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A U B R E Y.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“EMILIA WYNDHAM,”

&c. &c.

“Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted within them, and they found no City to dwell in.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A U B R E Y.

CHAPTER I.

Peace seemed to reign on the earth, and the
restless head of the ocean
Was for a moment consoled.

LONGFELLOW'S EVANGELINE.

CAPTAIN AUBREY lifted up his eyes at this moment—and whose should they meet but those of Lady Emma.

He and Mountford, during the latter part of this conversation, had left the betting stand, and had continued to make their way amid a crowd of people and carriages; but in the earnestness of their talk they had at length stopped, and without perceiving it they stood close by the panels of a coroneted

coach, into which the horses were about to be harnessed.

The ladies who had to leave the course in this carriage, were hurried into it in a very unceremonious manner by the son of one, and brother of the other—He, who had them in charge, knowing that it was incumbent upon him to see them safely in, before he left the course, which he was in a great hurry to do.

Lord Algernon had entered the grand stand in an impatient manner, pushing with little ceremony through the crowd of men and women, now rapidly leaving the place; the royalties having departed some quarter of an hour ago.

“Come, mother!—Come, Emma!—Where’s Emma?”

“Why are you in such a prodigious hurry, Algernon.—There is abundance of time.—Wait a little till the people have had time to defile down stairs—You know I detest that pushing and knocking about, which one gets among a crowd of women—the rudest and most brutal of all crowds, *I* think;—besides, do you not see that the horses are not yet brought up.—Wait till the carriage comes to the door.”

“No, mother, I can’t wait—I must be off—I can’t wait, I tell you, and I won’t wait,”—stamping his feet up and down with impatience,—“Where is that girl, Emma? The horses will be here in no time—You must let me put you into your coach at once—for I must be off—Where is that girl, Emma?—She’ll drive me mad, and you too.—There is nobody to see you to your carriage—Where is she?”

The Marchioness smiled, and turned her head very slowly round, and then cast her eyes most expressively upon those of her son. There was Emma, upon the other side of her mother, hidden by the ample drapery of the somewhat bulky Marchioness, who was standing up, whilst Emma and the Prince sat upon the bench close behind her, engaged in what appeared very interesting conversation.

The eyes of Lord Algernon followed those of his mother; then he gave a low whistle. “Sits the wind so?” he muttered—then he shook his head, and went up to his sister, and, to the excessive vexation of the Marchioness, broke abruptly into the whispering going on, by saying roughly,

“What the deuce, Emma, do you mean to stay here all day? Don’t you see that almost everybody is gone? Come along—let me put you and my mother into the carriage, for I want to be off—come along.”

And he was putting her arm in his, but the Marchioness interfered, with

“Give *me* one arm, Algernon, and your sister the other. . . . But, I protest”—glancing at the window—“there is such a crowd, I fear we shall never get through three abreast.”

“Oh! never fear. There, Emma—hook on.”

“May I . . . ?”

And his highness had already her arm in his.

Algernon cast another dissatisfied look at his sister; but the lady mother, seeing matters arranged to her satisfaction, was as impatient to proceed as her son could be, and thus they tried to get to the carriage—the arm of the young creature resting upon that of her princely admirer—and so with considerable difficulty they reached the coach, and Emma entered it upon the opposite side from that upon which Captain Aubrey and young Mount-

ford stood talking. And the highness having put the young lady in, and spying something in another quarter which attracted his attention, took his leave, and walked away.

Emma had been separated from her mother in the confusion of the crowd, and she reached the carriage first, and of course seated herself upon the further side. She sat down, and began to amuse herself by looking out of the open window, when lo! close by, but with their backs turned towards her, she saw Captain Aubrey and another young man engaged in conversation.

The carriage was still to all appearance empty, and they were so near to it that she could not help hearing every word that passed, though they spoke low.

And every word did she drink in with an interest that speedily thrust his highness and everything connected with him out of her head.

She had listened with a beating heart, unconscious that she was listening, and had heard what passed—Edward's kind and generous remonstrances with the young man, whom everybody knew, everybody laughed at, everybody

encouraged in his folly, and no one on earth *but* Edward had ever thought of taking pity upon, or saving—and she had heard the poor young fellow's reply. Then came the offer of money—the offer to pay a debt, and at a time when it was evident, for some reason or other, that Captain Aubrey wanted a supply very much—and then the generous reply, ending with—“ I shall find some other means of getting the money.”

Words never to be forgotten. The speech had sent the blood tingling to her cheeks, and the water stood brimming in her eyes; when at that very moment he looked up, and met those eyes. There was such an expression in them!—but they were instantly withdrawn, and the lids fell, and the eyes were bent upon the ground. But she had not withdrawn the hand—the hand and arm, which, as she had listened, lay upon the open window.

The look could not be mistaken, his old suspicions vanished like a dream, he was at her side in an instant, and her hand in his, and his eyes imploringly raised to her face—“ Emma, Emma,” he ventured to say.

She was silent—but the soft colour that

mounted to her face, and the eyes for a moment raised, and the look that met his—
“Emma—Emma—”

It was the first time that he had ventured to use the endearing expression—a form of address which at once reveals the whole heart—which tells that the barriers of society, however strong—however far apart they may have kept them—are thrown down between those two—henceforth the two are one. She just muttered a response, the only one that could have been as expressive as the appeal—

“Edward.”

He ventured to bend his head and press his lips upon her hand—then he raised his head and said—

“I shall see you again to-morrow.”

“Yes,” was the reply.

“I shall come to your house and see your father. You will not go up to town till Friday. I shall find you at the Holms.”

“Yes—”

And the hand he held began to quiver and tremble a little.

“I shall find him at home soon after breakfast, Emma.”

She hesitated a moment in her answer, and then said—

“ I forgot—Not to-morrow, please—He is engaged to drive out, and he is to stay two nights at Lord F.’s, I believe.”

“ Cannot I follow him there? ”

She blushed and hesitated again, but ended by saying—

“ No, please don’t go there—we shall be in town the next day.”

“ May I write—may I write to your mother? ”

“ Yes . . . ”

The horses were now being brought up to the carriage, he let go the hand, and she hastily drew herself within, and then she sank back into the corner of the carriage, in a perfect bewilderment of sweet and happy feelings. Princes and nobles, admiration and pleasure all forgotten, and her heart overflowing with the certainty that she was beloved; that she was already in a manner engaged, bound for ever and ever, to one so dear and so worthy.

Her heart was satisfied, and vanity and coquetry were gone for evermore.

She was a nobler creature from that time. A generous, well-placed attachment is the day-spring of a woman's existence. She could not speak—she felt too supremely happy for words—as there she sat, sunk back in the carriage, her handkerchief pressed to her face, though she was not crying.

At last her mother entered.

The young girl's eyes were closed, and her mother, excessively well pleased with the events of the day, thought that quite tired out she had fallen asleep; so she left her to herself, and Emma had the felicity of enjoying her own thoughts undisturbed, whilst the carriage started off for the Holms, the temporary house which the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux had taken, situated about four miles from the Ascot race course.

They were pledged to each other, then—

She loved him.—Not a doubt of it remained upon his mind—He was of an open, confiding nature—the jealousy which had tortured him had been in a manner forced upon

him; it was in contradiction to his entire temper, and that it was which had rendered it so unsupportable a burden.

The rapture of the return to confidence—perfect entire confidence, filled his heart with felicity great as hers—it could not be greater.

The carriage drove off rapidly. He stood and watched it till it was no longer in sight, and then he turned away to look out for his servant, who was riding about the course, leading his master's horse. As he was wandering about in a rather absent mood, he was startled by the 'hallo' of a horseman, who was leaving the course at a brisk trot, and was very near running over him.

"Hallo! What are you about? Can't you keep out of the way?"

"Oh! I beg you ten thousand pardons, Captain Aubrey."

It was Mr Stanhope.

The glance, as he looked up, was like cold sleet to the breast of Aubrey.—Yes, it was Mr Stanhope, and at sight of him all the events of the last two hours, till then forgotten, rushed to his mind, and crimson-

ing to the temples, he hurried away, impatient to find his horse, and gallop off the course.

He at last found what he sought—but never had Charles, the groom, seen his master in such a humour.—It was the first time in his life that he had ever thought him unjust as well as impatient.

“You rascal!”—with an oath—a thing rarely uttered by his lips—“where have you been all this time? Is it my business to go hunting you all over the course?”

“I was walking the horses quietly about, just at the place you told me to wait for you, Captain Aubrey”—said Charles, touching his hat respectfully, but with a certain inflexion of the voice which showed he felt hurt.

“Well—well—Give me the bridle. Have you seen Lord Algernon leave the course?”

“No, sir—but . . .”

And as he spoke, Lord Henry Fitzjames’s carriage and four shot by at full speed, filled with young men—and Algernon touched his hat to Aubrey as he passed.

“Where are they going to?—Do you know?” said the master.

“To town, sir.”

“Are you sure?”—

“The servants told me that they were ordered for town immediately the race was over.”—

“Very well.”

And putting his horse to his full speed, Aubrey quitted the field, and hastened towards London.

His heart and head were in a tumult—

His heart was throbbing with sweet emotions—filled with joy unspeakable at having thus so suddenly attained the consummation of his wishes, and revelling in the bliss which waits upon love declared and returned. He was more than ever charmed with her. There was something so feeling and delicate about her manner—something so more than answering to what, in his fondest imaginations, he had thought and believed of her!

But then to blight these blessed sensations of security and joy, came the agitating recollection of the situation in which he had just placed himself. The money which, in reckless despair, he had flung away under the cruel disappointment of his dearest hopes. The note of hand,

which would probably be presented for payment the very next day, and the total inadequacy of his own resources to meet it.

The attack of illness under which his father was at present labouring combined to increase his distress. Any kind of agitation was strictly forbidden by the medical men. He knew well, as I have said, what his father's opinions were as respected gambling of every description, and though five thousand pounds was no very important sum for one of his large fortune, yet, the loss of five thousand pounds is never a particularly agreeable circumstance to any one, and Mr Aubrey was a man who, though liberal in his expenditure, yet rated money at its just—perhaps a good deal above its just value. He abhorred extravagance—and looked with no little contempt upon those who carelessly flung away that sinew, not only of war, but of social life.

Edward would have hesitated under any circumstances, in the present state of his father's health, to communicate the intelligence of his engagement, though he knew it would afford him so much pleasure—and now, when it might have served to extenuate what had

passed, and sweeten the more disagreeable disclosures he had to make, he felt still more afraid lest it might increase the danger by multiplying the causes of excitement.

Perplexed and anxious, he reflected as well as the hurry of his rapid course would allow, upon what was to be done; and it was not till he had somewhat abated of his speed, and was pacing his horse through Hyde Park, at that time of day, a solitude deserted by its usual gay inhabitants, that he came at last to a conclusion.

His decision was such as characters generous as his own usually in such cases arrive at, namely, to adopt the alternative least painful to others, and most unpleasant to himself.

He resolved that his father should remain in total ignorance of what had occurred, and that he would apply to Lord Algernon for the money he wanted.

It is always disagreeable to ask for money. Few things are more trying to one species of courage than this. The courage in question is a thing apart from other descriptions of bravery—but it resembles them in this,—that it may spring alike from the basest or from the

noblest qualities. Either from a hard insensibility, which defies pain either in the form of receiving or inflicting it—or from a strong moral sense and the habit of doing what is in itself right, however irksome and disagreeable. That it was right in this instance to apply to Lord Algernon, and not to his father, for money, there could be no doubt. Lord Algernon was in his debt for a larger sum than that which he wanted. The entire balance of his winnings upon the not to be forgotten night was still in his hand. It was large, even after poor Mountford's losses had been deducted.

Lord Algernon had, as he sat at the table, offered his share to Edward, saying,—“Here, Aubrey, take it—Five thousand five hundred pounds, I calculate it. Count your money and put it into your pouch.”

But Edward, disgusted at what had passed, and sick at his own success, had left the money upon the table, saying, as he turned away—“We will settle it some other time,” and had quitted the club with Mountford, and so onwards to his own home.

From that hour not one word had passed with regard to this money.

It is dangerous work leaving a sum like this in the hands of an extravagant man. Still more so in those of a gambler. Such men readily forget that what they thus hold will, one day or other, have to be restored. The possession of a large balance at his banker's—let it really belong to whom it may, makes a man feel virtually rich—and if he be one, like too many, who never know the sum total of their debts,—and consider only in the lump that they know they have debts which must some time or other be discharged—it is apt to lead to careless expenditure, even in the best cases. In the one before us the effect had been most perilous, and Lord Algernon had been tempted by it to incur risks which otherwise he could not have ventured upon. He had, however, been very successful—his run of luck had been astonishing—and he went down to Ascot a rich man—confiding almost blindly in his good fortune, and expecting by his book there to double his gains.

Edward had been made acquainted with his success—rather by common report among mutual friends than from anything Lord Al-

gernon had himself said. He was aware, too, that he must have lost at Ascot—but had no reason to suppose to any great amount—so that he had no scruples, except those of mere delicacy, in asking for his money. And feelings of this sort he determined, without hesitation, to overcome.

So having arrived at this conclusion, he gave his tired horse time to breathe, and sauntered quietly along the Park, intending to leave it by Hyde Park corner gate, and proceed immediately to Lord Algernon's lodgings in the Albany.

The evening was soft and calm, and the peace and quiet that pervaded the almost solitary scene was in harmony with that tranquillity of mind which succeeds to a righteous determination. Edward looked around upon the trees throwing their long shadows over the grass, where the numerous herds of cattle were quietly browsing, and upwards to that sky, now all in a glow with the last beams of a setting sun—and thence his imagination travelled to the abode in a remote county which was his father's, and would sometime be his own—a home worthy

of the charming girl—whose hand he still seemed to press, and whose faintly murmured “Yes”—and “Yes,” and “Yes”—fell so sweetly upon his memory. Even for her—that fine—that noble—that almost princely residence, seemed a place fair enough.

Then he thought with fresh admiration of the honourable exertions of his father, which had secured such a possession for himself and his heirs, and which had entitled him, a mere sailor, to make pretension to this beautiful child of the aristocracy and be received as an acceptable suitor. His affection for his father had always been very great—but now, his heart softened by the late scene with Lady Emma, and his appreciation of what Mr Aubrey had done for him thus enhanced, it seemed as if he had never felt how much he loved him before.

And again he reflected with remorse upon the way in which he had of late trifled with his father’s anxieties. He had felt they were exaggerated—but had he not overrated his own strength? and with the usual presumption of youth, suffered himself to regard his father’s representations with a slight approach to con-

tempt—as the over-cautious warnings of an old and worn-out man?

He now saw all the folly and ingratitude, of which he had been guilty—and whilst he rejoiced at his narrow escape, and at the good fortune which had given him the means of rescuing himself from his present unpleasant dilemma, he made the most serious resolution, henceforth and for ever, to renounce gaming in every one of its forms. He was at last become fully aware of its dangers to a character rash and impetuous as his own. In this mood, it was, that he at length found himself at Lord Algernon's door.

He expected to have found his friend at home, reposing after the fatigues of Ascot—but he was not there. His servant said he had gone out without dressing. It was probable that he was at his club.

Edward called first at the Junior United Service, with a faint, and but a faint, hope of finding Algernon. There he was not, however,—so, to the club in C. street Captain Aubrey most reluctantly turned his steps.

CHAPTER II.

Manlike is it to fall into sin,
Fiendlike is it to dwell therein.

LONGFELLOW.

FULL of his newly excited feelings of aversion and disgust, Captain Aubrey crossed the threshold of the club in C— street. He entered its small but beautifully adorned entrance hall, now lighted up by the large central lamp so as to display in perfection the variegated marbles and the imitation of tessellated pavement with which it was adorned.

He then glanced into the large lower room, but he scarcely hoped to find his friend there. The apartment was more crowded than usual, for many had returned from Ascot, rather inclined to dine, and drink hock and champagne, than to risk any additional money that night. Groups of young men

were sitting round the different supper tables, discussing the irreproachable fare before them and the great topic of the day, with almost equal interest and avidity.

Loud debate was going on, regarding the payment of the bets upon the favorite. That she had been physicked seemed to be considered by some as past a doubt, whilst it appeared to be equally demonstrative to others that the potion had been perfectly innocent, and had been administered merely to affect the question of paying the bets in case of her losing the race.

Noisy were the arguments and great the doubts as to how the matter would be settled by the Jockey Club. But the majority seemed decidedly of opinion that the bets must be paid. Edward had, as we have seen, already settled this matter as regarded himself—so he listened to what was going on with little interest, and kept looking round in search of Lord Algernon.

At last he beheld him, sitting at a small table in a distant corner, supping by himself. So making his way through the excited throng, he went up to him.

He was struck by his appearance. The young man looked pale and jaded, his hair and dress were in disorder, and he was evidently fatigued in body, and vexed in mind.

Edward felt considerable repugnance to ask him for money at such a time—but duty must be done—that was the maxim of his life.

So he sat himself down upon a chair standing vacant by Lord Algernon, and saying, “My good fellow,” arrested his attention, for he seemed so lost in his own thoughts that he appeared not to notice Captain Aubrey’s approach.

He started and turned round, with an exclamation, and a half-muttered oath.

“Is it you?”

“Yes,” said Edward.—“It is I, without doubt.”

“I thought you had foresworn this wicked place,” said the other, with something the least in the world like a sneer.

“So I have; I come here to-night merely in search of you.”

“In search of me!—Well—and for what? I hope not as Mentor would seek the lost

Telemachus, to recal me from the error of my ways,—because you might have spared your respectable limbs that fatigue, my venerable friend—inasmuch as I am as sick of *my* goddess as ever the young mooncalf could be of his Calypso.—I merely came here to-night because the cutlets and the wine are better, than elsewhere—and there is less danger of my meeting with people whom, in my present ferocious humour, I don't want to see.

“I am sorry you are in a ferocious humour,” said Edward, endeavouring to hide his disagreeable feelings as best he might from himself and his friend, “for I am certainly one of those—at least, in my present character—whom men in their most angelic moods are not very apt to make welcome—in short, Algernon, I come in the form of a dun—I have lost five thousand pounds at Ascot to-day—”

Lord Algernon cast up his eyes.

“And the long and short of it is, I don't like to trouble my father just now, because I am sorry to say, he is very far from well—”

“And would be shocked—Eh?”

“And so, if you could give me a cheque for the five thousand pounds balance remain-

ing in your hands of our almost infamous gains of the other night, why, I should be very much obliged to you."

"Not in the least"—gulping down a something—an oath perhaps, and with an air of cold pettishness which he strove to render disengaged and cordial—"the money is your own. Will you oblige me?—your hand is upon the bell; will you ring for pen and paper, or shall we go to the library—oh, I forgot we are at C——'s, and have no library."

Edward would not put out his hand to ring—he could not. He felt as if Lord Algernon ought to have spared him that office.

"You won't—Here, bring pen, ink, and paper"—as a waiter passed by—"and let me have that cutlet as soon as you can, and an *omelette aux abricots*, and some of Mr S——'s best hock.—This wine, tell him, is infamous."

Then he strove hard to recover his temper, and he did recover it, so far, at least, as to bring himself to say,

"I suppose you took my advice, and I am very sorry that I gave it—that's all. But you need not pay yet—Are you aware of that?"

"I have given my note of hand, which will be taken up early to-morrow morning."

"Who was the bet with?"

"A Mr Stanhope."

"*That* rascal! How did you come across *him*? I never bet with him, 'cause he's not a gentleman."

The waiter returned, bringing the pen and paper, and Lord Algernon wrote a cheque upon his bankers.

Edward, filled with all sorts of uncomfortable feelings, had turned away whilst this was being done, and he did not observe the tremulous, shaking hand, or the contracted brow of the writer. Hurriedly the cheque was finished and signed, and then touching Captain Aubrey's elbow, Lord Algernon, with as careless an air as he could assume, said,

"What a brown study you are in! What's the matter with you? Take your money—there it is."

"But," said Edward, now sitting down at the table, the cheque in his hand, "tell me candidly whether this will be of any serious inconvenience to you, Algernon—in which case I will think of some other method of getting

what I want, though, to tell truth, if that had been easy, I would not have troubled you."

"Oh! say no more about it—the money's your own."

"I hope," Edward began again, "that you were not so unlucky as I was at Ascot."

"Don't speak of it!—The sooner those things are forgotten the better. There are ways and means of making it up with fortune."

"But I trust, Algernon. . . Let me say a few words to you as friend to friend. . . . I have quarrelled with myself severely ever since that night when, in a fit of desperation, I first seized the dice, and was so preposterously lucky. I have been haunted with the idea that it was *my* success which tempted you to forsake whist for this more dangerous and ensnaring game. I have been wishing to speak to you upon the subject. It may seem very ridiculous in me to counsel one who knows the world a great deal better than I do; but do not go on . . . break through this fatal habit, and at once. Above all, do not endeavour to repair your ill-luck in this dangerous manner—and if—if what I have asked for to-night will really inconvenience you. . . .

Here !”—tearing the cheque in pieces as he spoke—“perish that a thousand times rather—perish all!—than tempt to a renewal of these perilous doings.”

“Hum! hum!—ha! ha! Why, Edward, you only want a wig and lawn sleeves. Preach!—*You preach to me!* Ha! ha! Why, it is the unfledged cockerel enlightening the king of the walk. My dear and most excellent callow Mentor, spare your pains—I’ll take good care of myself, don’t you fear; and yet”—and his eye, late so defying, softened a little — “you *are* a good fellow; but I’m sorry you tore up the paper, because I shall have the trouble of writing another; for harkye, Edward, if you don’t want your money, don’t come and ask me for it. I never allow any one to do that twice. So, so, here comes the cutlet, and here’s your cheque”—writing another, and tossing it across the table—“and now let us set to work in good earnest. Waiter, another plate.”

“Excuse me—I have no appetite to-night—I must be gone.”—

“No appetite—Why, my dear fellow, I thought you had more spunk.—What! a first

loss—and after such gains!—Well, I believe the first loss, like the first plunge, *will* try the nerves a bit.—It was so with me, if I recollect right—but it happened ages ago, when I was a slip of a lad.—Come, my fair novice, for I declare you look as white as Emma's hand—take heart of grace, and a glass or two of hock—all the banks have been shut these five hours, and you can't get your money to-night.”

And so saying, he helped himself to the delicate cutlets before him, repeating—“Too hungry for manners” . . . and began to eat voraciously, and drink bumper after bumper of the wine which stood before him.

Edward had risen from his chair at the first invitation to eat—but he did not go.—He stood there eyeing Lord Algernoon wistfully, who on his part seemed only intent upon devouring his cutlets—but there was a convulsive hurry about him as he did so—swallowing one large mouthful after another with greedy unnatural haste, that told of anything rather than the wholesome avidity for food which bespeaks a body exhausted, but a mind at ease.

He gulped down his dinner with as little real inclination for it as Edward himself—and in his face there was a strange expression of repressed agitation, and of a resolution to brave everything, united.

Edward stood irresolute, eyeing his friend, and holding the cheque still unfolded.

At last, laying his hand upon Lord Algernon's shoulder, and stooping down, he said—

“ I am not going to take this money ”—

Lord Algernon impatiently released his shoulder, and looking up with an air of haughty surprise into his friend's face, said—

“ You forget yourself—I think you dunned me for it.”

“ If that is the term you choose to use between you and me—be it so—yes, I confess I did *dun* you for it—but I have changed my mind, and will do without it.”

“ But I have not changed *my* mind.—Say no more, and if you don't want any supper, please to let me finish my own.—Please to stand out of the sun, said the ragged philosopher from his tub.—Please to let me eat my victuals in peace, say I.”

And he bent his head again to his plate.

Still Edward lingered, unwilling, irresolute, till Lord Algernon turned at last impatiently round.

“ I’ll tell you what, Aubrey—If you don’t please to take yourself and that confounded scrap of paper away—there’ll be a quarrel between you and me in no time.”

Then Edward turned from the table, and slowly descended the steps, and slowly took his way home. His spirits were excessively depressed—dark forebodings of, he knew not what, came over him.

In vain he endeavoured to rally—to cheer himself by dwelling upon the happy prospects which had opened during the last few hours—upon the sweet innocent smile—the softly murmured “ Yes ”—the hand that had so very gently, and almost imperceptibly answered to his.—It would not do. As if in an evil dream, haggard spectres crowded round and obscured the lovely vision.—Algernon’s face—so dark and ominous—the haggard, spectral countenances that haunt the gaming table!—desperate in their anguish, or ferocious in their joy!—The poor lad whom he had

saved was there too—though that figure in some degree qualified his painful thoughts—but he never had felt more depressed during the whole course of his life than at this moment.

In this humour he made his way along the streets, where the carriages were flashing hastily by—where open windows and the sound of gay music told of the festivities going on within—one scene of splendid and joyful bustle.

Concealing what—for the most part?

Empty, or miserable hearts?

As soon as Captain Aubrey was gone, Lord Algernon pushed his plate impatiently away, swallowed two more bumpers of wine, drew out his betting book, laid it upon the table, and, pulling the candle towards him, began to study the contents.

He sat there, his head resting upon his white, thin, almost skeleton hand, which was buried in the thick brown waves of his hair. Slowly, one after another, he looked over the pages,

and as he did so, gradually his face grew paler and paler, and the cloud upon his brow deeper and darker. His very lips grew white over his set teeth, and his eyes were dry and stony as those of a fiend in torment.

Slowly he turned page after page—again and again went over the numbers inscribed there—at last he took out his small gold pencil and began to cast up the sums marked down upon the leaves before him. And then upon the fly leaf he reluctantly set down the amount of each column, and made up the sums in one.

The total!—There it lay.

He looked at it with a fixed eye, moving not a muscle; but his face was black as night.

All those bad passions which attend upon the gambler were working in direst force within him.

The lust of gain—covetousness—the love of selfish luxury—the pride and exultation of late success—now, by a reverse, changed to bitterness and gall. Fierce despair—impatience of defeat—a reckless desperation, terminating in a proud defiance of all that was pru-

dent, wise, or even honourable ; and a resolution, in spite of every consideration, to redeem his fortunes, or perish in the attempt.

He had lost all, and now that Edward had asked for his five thousand pounds, there was barely enough left to satisfy the claims of this fatal betting-book. Enough there was, however, so that he could not even urge in defence of the conduct which followed, that he was driven to despair, and adopted it as the only means remaining to redeem his debts of honour—he had enough left to do that—but then, he would have remained penniless. He, who, not twenty-four hours before, had felt rich even beyond his own wants and wishes, extravagant as they were, was now a beggar, as he esteemed it, with only his pay in the world, and perhaps, a few tens of pounds remaining where so lately there had been tens of thousands—for such had been the result, incredible as it may seem, of his late astonishing run of luck.

To submit to this was impossible. His pride, his avarice—for who is so avaricious as the gambler and the spendthrift?—his love

of pleasure, his love of extravagance, of liberty and independence, all disappointed, and in their place, what to be looked for but economy, and tradesmen's bills, and all the irritating troubles of want of money?

Endure this?—Impossible! He could not and he would not. He would try his luck again.—True he was bare of cash.—There might not remain enough to pay his stakes if he lost—but he should win—he always did win—he would be cautious—with care, and half his usual luck, he must assuredly win.

And so he silenced that voice of honour, which, though conscience had long been asleep, still faintly whispered within his breast. And slowly closing and clasping his book, examining the fastening with a daudling unnecessary minuteness—he at length rose from the table, and swallowing yet two other glasses of wine, which finished his bottle, with a half reluctant step, he made his way to the hazard table.

They were playing *rouge et noir* in one part of the room, and he hesitated a moment, tempted to try his chance there.

But then he remembered his late success at hazard, and a sort of presentiment, as he thought, impelled him to the fatal board—a sort of promise—an internal assurance of success—which in the present state of his spirits—with the superstition common to such trying moments in life, he was tempted to look upon as prophetic.

The box is in his hand, and he throws, and casts a hasty anxious glance at the figures—and as usual—

He has won—

The sum was not considerable—but what mattered that, in his present humour? It was the renewal of confidence in his own good fortune, that he wanted—This was the answer, as it seemed, and the confirmation of his best anticipations.—It was as if a heavy load was taken from his breast, his countenance assumed its usual expression, and drawing a chair—for in his agitation and anxiety he has remained standing—he sat down, prepared and resolved to make a night of it.

And now he throws once more, and for a larger stake, and wins—and now he plays double or quits, and wins again.

You should have watched that gambler's face—How all its pallid wretchedness, and its dark anxiety—its bitterness and blackness disappeared, to make way for a wild and terrible joy. A fiendish joy, we may well call it, as he glanced at the man with whom he was playing, and whose agitation was fearful to behold. But a fierce and cruel brightness lighted up Lord Algernon's face, the red fiery colour rose to his cheek, till, by degrees, it assumed that peculiar satanic look, expression, and hue which belongs to men who lead a life such as this—an alternation of misery and pride—with a hard unpitying look he fixed his insolent eye upon his pale and wretched adversary.

“Double or quits?” The sum was now becoming very considerable.

The young man opposite hesitated, trembled, looked up to the ceiling with a sort of appealing despair, and muttered, in a hollow, stifled voice, “Done.”

Lord Algernon threw—

“Sizes !”

And he sprang from his seat and shouted with exultation.

The young man reeled backwards, and covered his face with his hands.

He was about to retreat from the table, but a friend, who stood near, took hold of him by the elbow.

“Never say die—In for a penny, in for a pound—Try him once more, the luck must turn sooner or later.”

“But I have lost all—all—all—all!”

“Double or quits—double or quits!” shouted Algernon.

Heated as he was he had forgotten his usual caution, and had been swallowing bumper upon bumper of wine.

“Double or quits!”

“Take him—take him,” whispered the young man’s adviser, and the devil within his breast, added, “It will be but the same remedy—a pistol bullet—now, or then—what matters it? Take your chance for salvation.”

Salvation! This man had possessed, in his childhood, a careful mother. Years and years it was since she had died, and he had been left to his own guidance; but some faint traces of her early teaching still lingered in his mind. Until this moment, however irregular his con-

duct, his career had been strictly honourable. He had wronged no man, had been, in the common phrase, only his own worst enemy, and now, trembling upon the edge of that eternity in which he shudderingly believed, yet was preparing to rush upon uncalled—the voice so low and plaintive spoke again.

No—he would not—it was the crisis of his fate—one throw might redeem all—but if he lost he had no means of payment.

“No,” he said, and turned away—“I have not the money.”

But now, there was a kind of bustle of great excitement around the table where Lord Algernon still sat, shouting forth his challenges, “Double or quits—double or quits.”

“The odds are fearfully against him,” said a regular old adventurer in this dreadful traffic, “I’ll venture it!”—and he accepted the challenge.

There was a sudden lull.

Every eye was turned towards the table, where sat these two resolute men, eyeing one another with a sort of stern admiration of their mutual courage.

The attention of the young man, who had

already lost so much, was arrested, just as he was about to quit the room—he turned back, and with haggard countenance stood and watched the turn of fortune which might have been his own.

The eyes of the combatants are gleaming with unearthly fires, as with greedy, vulture expression, they fasten upon that small green field.

The fatal boxes strike the table—

Lord Algernon!—

He has fallen back in a sort of stupor, his eyes wide open, fixed and glaring, his clenched teeth visible between his white and parted lips.

He has lost!—

The old and practised gambler glanced at him, with a mingled expression of cool satisfaction and surprise.

“Untie his neckcloth,” was all he said, “and one of you fetch a glass of water and throw it into his face.”

“You should have taken my advice, Embury,” whispered the young man’s friend.

Embury stood there, still pale as death, his eyes fixed upon Algernon.

He looked into his friend's face, then fixed his eyes again upon the dreadful spectacle before him.

"No, no!"

"You are right," was the answer.

"Mother,—angel mother!" mentally ejaculated the young Embury to himself, "thanks, blessed mother!"—then, turning to his friend, with a face from which all despair had vanished, to be followed by the bright glow of courageous resolution. "Thank God I have enough to pay all—and then, not a pistol—but Australia!"

They have untied his neck handkerchief, and have thrown water into his face, and gradually he has recovered sensation.

He opens a bewildered eye and looks round, whilst his adversary remains quietly seated at the table. Algernon had been so stunned that it was some few minutes before he recovered himself sufficiently to speak, but when that time came, this was what he did and said, with a look which spoke the desperate defiance of wrong or right, which was going on within him.

He laid his hand upon the box and said—

“Try it again.”

“No, your pardon,” replied the gentleman opposite with great coolness—“Forty thousand pounds is enough for me, for one night—but, certainly, Lord Algernon shall not be denied his revenge provided he can give me security that the needful eighty thousand, in case he lose, shall be forthcoming.”

Algernon turned pale, and his eye glared fiercely at the cool ironical face of his adversary.

“Do you mean to insult me?”

“Nothing in the world farther from my intentions. But, in truth, I am but a poor wretch—a mere dabbler in these matters—and eighty thousand pounds is a sum that it might rather inconvenience me to lose—Though no doubt a mere trifle to your lordship—so I only intended to suggest, as a simple measure of prudence, that we should each of us cast a bird’s-eye view over the state of our affairs, before proceeding further.”

Algernon felt choking—passionate—desperate—agonising to try his luck once more, and extricate himself from the fearful situation

in which he stood; but, knowing it to be impossible to give the assurance demanded, he was obliged to relinquish the contest.

So, with a self-command worthy of a better cause, sternly compressing the tumultuous passions that were struggling for mastery within, he coldly said—

“After what has passed, as I make a point of only playing with gentlemen, I will have done for to-night.”

And, with a calmness perfectly astonishing, he wrote his I O U, handed it to the well-pleased adversary, rose from the table, and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

Quoi ! je pourrais descendre à ce lâche artifice . . .

Ceux de ma naissance doivent haïr la bassesse . . .

ROD OGUNE.

ALGERNON walked straight down stairs, turned into the Coffee room, where he had left his hat,—put it on, pressed it firmly down upon his head, and took his cane from the corner in which he had placed it—doing all this with a calmness, which was only the result of the blank despair within.

He was just leaving the room with intent to quit the house, when he was arrested by young Embury.—

“I beg your pardon, my Lord,—but we have not settled our accounts together—my property is partly invested in the funds, partly in mortgage—It will take a little time

to realise so as to redeem this—" and he handed him a paper.

A paper which conveyed to a stranger—a worthless stranger, all the property that he possessed in the world—Lost in the insane folly of an hour. And with it went his fair hopes of advancement in life—his tender aspirations after one dearly beloved and worthy to be beloved—all forfeited for this unaccountable madness.

It was more like a fearful dream than a reality.

He shook himself—he hoped to awaken.—He was no professed gambler, but his head already heated by the excitements of Ascot, he had taken too much wine,—his first losses had driven him almost desperate, and in his agony hoping to extricate himself, he had risked and lost his all.

All but his honour—*that* he had not pledged.

"It will take a little time to realise this," he repeated, "but I can assure you upon my honour, that there is sufficient to redeem the bill. The first thing to-morrow morning I will be at my banker's, and arrange matters,

so that your lordship shall have the money as soon as possible—In the mean while,” observing now for the first time Lord Algernon’s ghastly countenance, he said, “the bill will be negotiable, I believe.”

Lord Algernon stood staring at him as if the words scarcely reached his ear.

The outward appearance of calmness which he had maintained since he had left the table, belonged rather to one stunned out of his sensibility, who moves and acts like an automaton, than to a man in the possession of his senses.

As the young man continued to speak, slowly his powers of attention seemed to be returning.

“I—I—understand—Thank you, it will do quite well—I have no doubt . . . not the least doubt in the world—Pardon me, I did not mean to express any—Twenty-five thousand pounds—ch!” and he looked at the paper, “All right—good night, sir.”

And he was about to depart, leaving the bill in young Embury’s hands.

“But the young man caught him by the arm as he was going away.

“Excuse me again,” he said, “but you must take this, if you please.”

He now perceived and with great compassion, the state in which Lord Algernon was. The man in general regarded as so undaunted, so defiant of every risk, danger, and difficulty ! and Embury felt a mixture of pity and something like contempt when he found him, at this crisis, more overcome than he had been himself.

But he understood not the difference of the two cases. *He* was himself a ruined man, but his honour was safe.—He was saved—though as by fire. He was free, though penniless. Every obligation would be acquitted. True, hardship, hard work, and hard struggles lay before him, but he was the slave of sin no longer, the shackles had fallen from his hands ; at this heavy price he had purchased his deliverance !

But the wretched man on whom he gazed was plunged, by this last reverse of fortune, into a gulph of horrors, a sea of shame and dishonour, without hope or end.

No one suspected the whole state of the case. No one, but his now most miserable son, was acquainted with the true position in which the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux stood.

It is not necessary to enter into a detail of the circumstances of a deeply embarrassed

man—embarrassed to an almost limitless extent by that thoughtless expenditure without system, order, or calculation, which buries the individual in debt, though he may not have been guilty of any excessive vice or extravagance—the mere consequence of that sort of wastefulness and slackness of hand which seems to infatuate men never in the habit of attending properly to the state of their affairs, and which has sapped, and finally overthrown, many a fair and prosperous fortune.

Moreover, Lord Hurstmonceaux was an Irishman, and his property had been previously injured by the extravagance of the generations which preceded him, and had descended to him loaded with mortgages, annuities, and liabilities, which put him very much at the mercy of his lawyers. Indolent, self-indulgent, and careless, had been those who went before him, and he was little fitted to unravel the complicated web of embarrassments thus entailed. His affairs went on from bad to worse. He lived upon expedients. The ingenuity of his men of business was racked to find money for present expenses, but money they, some way or other, unfortunately contrived to find; so that their principal

was unchecked in his neglect of calculation, plan, and punctuality, whilst his ambitious lady indulged her passion for display—or rather, for settling her daughters, and advancing her sons, which she, assuming to be an unquestionable authority as a woman who knew the world—and who was universally reckoned a most excellent manager, asserted, and probably believed, was only to be effected in this way.

There was a large family of children.

Mostly young things, yet in the school-room, or nursery. The eldest son was imbecile, and therefore Lord Algernon had assumed to himself the privileges and influence, which, as a second brother, he could not in any other case have claimed; and he had allowed himself, and been indulged by his too fond mother in, expenses which neither accorded with his profession as a naval man, nor with his position in society—and less than all, with the real state of his father's affairs.

This sketch is necessary to account for the dilemma in which he found himself, and which increased in horror the more he considered it.

During the interval which had elapsed since he had given his note-of-hand for the enormous sum he had lost, his thoughts had been hurrying over the desolate, hopeless prospect which surrounded him. Not one ray of comfort to be discerned. No quarter from whence aid could be looked for. No resource of any description to be found.

And above stairs—a few steps from him, was a man holding papers which he, in the pride and haughtiness of his spirit, had signed and presented,—without deigning to cast a thought as to the means of taking them up.

Embury's note was, however, now in his hand.

Half his obligations were thereby discharged, but the remainder!—the remainder!—fifteen thousand pounds!—and his father could not even furnish him with one.

It was but the day before, that, conversing with his mother, she had told him of the terrible confusion of their affairs, and of the difficulty she had in finding money or credit, to enable her to settle the bills on account of her recent splendid entertainment,

which she declared it had been absolutely necessary to give for darling Emma's sake.

How he got out of the Club House—how he stumbled down the steps into the street—how he pursued his way like some blinded animal hurrying straight onwards he knew not whither—he never afterwards could recollect. It was not until he had walked a considerable way that his senses seemed to return.

He lifted up his eyes, and found that he had wandered to a great distance from the proper course to his lodgings, and as he looked around, he saw that the night was already waning—the lights of the street lamps were paling in their sockets, and the cold white dawn faintly streaked the horizon.

All around him was silent and still as the grave—that great, busy, multitudinous city was hushed in repose. Only the distant rumble of a few carts coming up from the country,—and the clocks which every now and then told off the hour, could be heard.

It is a time which breathes tranquillity, and which calms and soothes the fevered pulses of the night watcher,—as the fresh cool

air of that hour blows in gentle currents down each street.

But there was no tranquillity for him.

No quiet could soothe the irritation of his nerves, or cool his burning brow. His lips were deadly pale, as were his cheeks, except that a streak of red might be seen across them—that deep red burning bar, which looks like the mark upon Cain.

What was to be done?—How?—Where? What?

He turns down a street and lo! he is upon the iron bridge which crosses the Thames below Blackfriars, and early as is the hour, wherries with luggage and passengers,—trunks, hat-boxes, and carpet-bags, and men attired as for travelling, are shooting onwards down the river.—A man in an empty wherry hails him, as there he stands, and looks over the balustrade. The steamer for Antwerp, the Apollonia, is to sail, at half-past five that morning—this notice he now sees staring him in the face in enormous letters upon a large white paper fixed up against the wall before him, and which he had not observed before.

Shall he descend the stairs, take his place in the wherry, and escape? The thought was too tempting to be resisted! He hailed the boatman in his turn, and almost before he knew where he was, he is there upon the bosom of the Thames, making his way due eastward.

The lulling motion of the wherry rather inclined him to sleep than to reflect. The first sensation after the fierce paroxysm of the preceding hours was of a dull and drowsy sense of repose. He made no effort to resist it—but fairly worn out, body and mind, yielded to the influence, and lost himself altogether, as the phrase is, until he was awakened by the prow of the wherry striking against the side of the black enormous mass which loomed above him, and he found himself looking up at the ladder, by which numerous passengers, who had come down the river, were ascending to the deck of the *Apollonia*.

“Here we are, sir,” said the waterman, “if so be that it is the *Apollonia* that we are a coming for—two shillings, if you please, is my fare—thank ye, sir”—as Algernon flung him half-a-crown—“a fresh breeze and right

down river, and promising for a fair sky—I wish you a pleasant voyage—Anything more that I can do for you, sir?”

No answer—and Lord Algernon stands upon the deck.

He found himself surrounded by busy seamen, rushing up and down, and by passengers pushing about for seats, and calling for their luggage, and taking leave of friends, and providing for the comfort of children. The benches were already filled with women, in horrid ugly bonnets and cloaks, such as the more ordinary English woman loves to array herself in upon a voyage, and with men in rough coats and wide-awakes, fastened with a ribbon to the button-hole. A few well-dressed, aristocratical-looking ladies herded together upon a side bench, and their smartly attired lady's maids, and their respectable head nurses sat at a little distance, striving to keep the children from scampering all over the ship, whilst the husbands and brothers, men to whom time is of value, and punctuality, in their inferiors at least, an indispensable, were collected round the captain arguing and remonstrating.

"Half-past-five," it was the hour announced in every advertisement, whether in 'Times,' 'Morning Herald,' or 'Morning Post,' and the vessel is not to sail until half-past-eleven.

The cause of this delay is immaterial to our story—it is with the effect of it that we have alone to do.

Lord Algernon had ascended the ladder and planted his feet upon the deck before he well knew where he was or what he was about.

He was still dizzy with the sort of dog sleep into which he had fallen, and it was not till the fresh wind which blew into his face had played some time upon his temples, that the fevered brain began to cool, and the confusion of his thoughts to subside.

And then he became aware of where he was, and sensible to external influences once more, and his eye glanced round upon the scene before him. He scarcely deigned to observe the mob of ordinary passengers, with whom he had nothing in common; but he looked towards that little party of apparently high-bred women who were sitting upon the bench

upon the further side of the vessel, and upon the figures of one or two well-dressed and fashionable-looking men, who were hovering around them, and that sight, as by magic, dissolved the world of dreams, and restored him to the realities of society. Anxious not to be seen, his first impulse was to turn steerage-way, and go to the head of the vessel, where there were none but sailors about; so, passing over cables and between heaps of various sorts of merchandise and luggage, he made his way to a coil of ropes, and upon it, almost at the very end of the deck, he sat down.

And he looked out upon the blue heavens, and upon the rolling river, and upon the vast city, which lay before and around him, and then he rested his cheek upon his hand, and thought upon what he was about to do.

Fly from his country a defaulter—his debts of honour unpaid. That was what he was going to do, and, as a consequence, forfeit his position in society, his place in his profession—every advantage he possessed in life, and henceforth become a vagabond upon the earth, ashamed to show his face among honourable men.

Anything more disgraceful than the conduct he meditated could scarcely be. Far better would it have been to have conquered the proud spirit within—to have humbled himself under the distress into which his own folly had brought him—confess his difficulties to the man who had won his money, implore his patience and ask for time.

But he was not the man capable of making reparation for wrong by submission to duty. He was not in the habit of thinking what was right, only of what was expedient—perhaps only, of what was easiest to be done. To confess that he staked advisedly what he knew he was unable to pay, was a humiliation to which his haughty spirit found it impossible to submit—anything rather than that, said the mocking fiend within. .

Yet to fly—to be branded as a defaulter!—was not that the worst of all?

To be disgraced for ever, and banished for life from society!—condemned to find companionship with the infamous alone!

Infamous like himself!

Equally insupportable!

It was, perhaps, about an hour that he sat upon the coil of rope, lost in thought, his hand covering his eyes.

At length he seemed to have taken his resolution. He rose with the air of a man who has discovered some expedient to relieve him from the utmost embarrassment, and walking towards the waist of the vessel, he asked the engineer when she was really to start—

“Because,” said he, “I have some business which I think will be best completed before I leave England; and it will take me about an hour. Shall I have time?”

The engineer looked at his watch. Eight o'clock.

“Abundance of time, sir. We shall not be under weigh until half-past eleven.”

Algernon immediately quitted the deck, and making his way rather slowly through the crowd which was gathered upon the quay, like a man who is in no hurry to effect that which he is about to undertake, he turned up one of those narrow streets which lead citywards from the Thames, and entered the first tavern that presented itself.

He asked for a private room, pen, ink, and paper.

The people enquired whether he would not have some breakfast.

He refused—but called for a glass of water.

This he drank, and then sat down and leaned his elbows upon the table, and his head upon his hands, till the pen, ink, and paper were brought.

“Is this the best paper you have? It is as transparent as glass.—Can you get me no better covers than these?”

“Hard by at the stationer’s, sir.”

“Fetch some, do you hear? and the best envelopes they have.”

And whilst the boy went on his errand, Algernon took a sheet of the paper which lay before him, and wrote a long, hurried, scrawling, vehement letter, which he folded, placed in the envelope, fastened and stamped.

By this time the boy had returned with the better paper, which he had asked for, and with larger and thicker envelopes.

“Sealing wax and a candle.”

“Yes, sir.”

The boy retired to fetch them.

Then Algernon took out of his side pocket the paper signed by Embury, looked at it, and folded it, then he wrote with considerable care and hesitation upon a half note sheet, which he tore off, and finally he wrote rapidly upon another sheet.—All these papers, including the bill from Embury, he folded together and enclosed in the envelope, which he sealed with his own arms, and then he took up his hat, and inquired whether he could post a letter at Margate,—where he understood that the steamer usually stopped to take up passengers,—being answered in the affirmative, he put the letters which he had written into his pocket, and they were subsequently posted at Margate.

And consequently did not, as he calculated, arrive in town until the evening of that day, at an hour when all the banking houses would be shut.

After having finished his writing, he looked at his watch, and finding there was abundance of time to spare, he strolled a little further on, and made a few necessary purchases, among others of a carpet bag and dressing box.

Without a dressing box—*necessaire* as it was called in those days, you remember it was impossible for Marie Antoinette to travel, even at the crisis of her fate—the escape to Verdun.

At a quarter before eleven, Lord Algernon returned to the Apollonia, and no longer seeking the obscurity of the steerage, went forwards towards the stern of the vessel, and fell into conversation with the man at the wheel.

He looked quite composed now, and his countenance had assumed its usual expression, only that there was wanting a certain carelessness and gaiety usually to be found there. He certainly looked grave,—but he seemed satisfied with what he had been doing, and his satisfaction appeared rather to increase than diminish, as time passed on.

The hour for departure was now arrived, the huge paddle wheels began to play,—and the vast, black hull to plough onwards, plunging heavily through the waters.

The sun shone brightly by this time, and the day promised to be beautiful. The soft and small white clouds were fleeting slowly

before the pleasant breeze, over the blue, blue sky. And the sun cast its bright gleams, gilding the shores, and whitening the sails of crowds of vessels, which, with their canvas all spread, were making their way down the river.

The scene was charming, as such scenes ever are,—with the shifting groups—the shining waters—the sun now brightly gleaming, now crossed by a coursing cloud, and casting the whole into momentary shadow.

The influences of this delightful morning seemed to pervade the whole of the little society assembled upon deck. People sat upon the different benches, eyeing the water, or gazing upwards at the sky, enjoying the delicious freshness of the air, after the heavy atmosphere of the great town. The little party of ladies and gentlemen, who have been before mentioned, continued together; some sitting upon cushions on the deck, some on camp stools, some upon the side benches leaning over the gangway, and watching the little rippling waves as they coursed gaily along.

Some of the party were reading, others

working, all were chatting very gaily and pleasantly, as it seemed. Children were sitting upon the deck, or running about in the midst of them—

It had the air of a thoroughly comfortable party, composed of what you would call very nice people—and Lord Algernon was soon attracted to them. The agitation of the preceding hours appeared to have subsided, and he watched them for some time. At last he found himself drawing near to the group, and after a boat had carried his letters to Margate, and the vessel began to approach the open sea, he fell into conversation with one of the gentlemen. When the hour for luncheon arrived, he handed down one of the ladies, and soon was in high talk with a very pleasant, chatty, well-bred girl. The party soon made out who he was, and cordially rejoiced in his company; whilst he reflected upon the plan he had adopted, and felt very glad that he had not banished himself from society for ever.

And so—

He made, after all, an agreeable voyage to Antwerp.

CHAPTER III.

There is confusion worse than death,
Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,
Long labour unto aged breath—
Sore task to hearts worn out with many wars.

TENNYSON.

MR AUBREY sits in his dressing-room.

This dressing-room opens out of a large, airy, and most comfortable bed-room—but it is in itself anything but a comfortable-looking place—according to modern ideas of comfort.

It reminds me of that never-to-be-forgotten dressing-room of the most celebrated Englishman of our age—The Great Duke—

Who did not go to see that dressing-room? —The room which revealed, more than a thousand words could have done, the true character of the man.

The earnest, business-like reality, and simple habits of one endowed with genius so eminent for the conduct of actual life—for deal-

ing with *facts*.—With things as they are—and not things as we fancy them, or would have them to be.—How pregnant was that scene!—How expressive of the direct and straight-forward nature of its master!—He had no time for the encumbrances of luxury.—The unavoidable litter of life was suffered to fall aside and accumulate unheeded. Leisure seemed wanted to select, to arrange, to clear away. There, stood his plain and half-worn out scarlet arm-chair—and with such another just opposite, to be occupied by any one with whom he wanted to converse.—The only luxury to be found was the plain unadorned folding screen, which sheltered him from too much light or air. What a contrast to a certain screen elaborately ornamented by the persevering labours of Brummel, which I once saw : so tastefully covered with pictures and landscapes, and fruit, and leaves, and flowers ! the simple labour of half a useless existence.

What an air of business there was in that great, heavy, ugly writing table ; covered with heaps of things, no longer in use, but all once of use ! Books and portfolios, and

pamphlets, and maps, and parliamentary papers—the rubbish of a vigorous life.

And then the untied parcels, here and there, just left as death had surprised him!—surprised him at his eighty years as it surprises us all, cutting us short in the midst of our hopes, our expectations, our labours—severing us at one stroke from that to-morrow which we shall never see.

Happy the man who is found labouring—

But happier far the one who is found watching.

Mr Aubrey, then, is sitting in a dressing room, in its character of business something resembling the one I have faintly endeavoured to describe, though wanting its simplicity, being indeed loaded with wealth and luxury.

For men who have recently made very large fortunes by commerce, are usually impatient to make a show of their money, and, moreover, they have an odd sort of conscientiousness as regards the spending it—a feeling, I may say, common to respectable Englishmen. They feel ashamed of the cheap, as if they

were lending themselves to a deception—every thing they buy must be *good*—must be, as far as circumstances will admit—of the very best of its kind that it is possible to procure without regard to cost.

Much unnecessary expense is in that way no doubt incurred, and it is this idea of respectability more or less prevading all classes, which probably adds materially to the expense of English living.

What cannot be thoroughly well done, it is thought ought not to be attempted at all.

It is different with our continental neighbours, and in consequence they seem to enjoy life much more than we do—but the feeling when not pushed to extreme is noble and good. And it may be questioned whether the sentiment, though frequently exaggerated, has not its foundation in something lofty and truthful, which renders home-spun John Bull a more genuine article, than his brilliant rivals.

But enough of this.

Mr Aubrey's dressing room bore evidence that it had been fitted up with something of

this feeling. There was not much display, —but no expence had been spared.

The curtains of a dark gloomy colour were of the thickest and finest cloth, with deep massive silken fringes of the same grave hue, and the cornice was very richly and elaborately carved, but in so darkly-coloured a wood, that all the fine workmanship was almost lost in that shady room.

The carpet and the hearth rug of the richest pile were equally expensive in their substance, and equally modest and subdued in their colour. So were the book-shelves, which occupied two sides of the room. They were formed of the most costly wood,—yet, save the carving of the handsome cornices, perfectly plain and surmounted with a few casts and vases, precious specimens of art, but all of the same sober character.

A large table stood in the centre of the room. Its finely inlaid sides and top being almost perfectly obscured to sight,—by heaps and heaps of papers lying at top—whilst portfolios containing more and more papers were leaning against the sides. Massive chairs, covered with velvet of the same dark

hue as the curtains, and numerous tables, loaded as was the centre one—completed the furnishing of the room. Over the chimney of which, in lieu of mirror, hung a gloomy picture, of the Massacre of the Innocents, from the pencil of Zurberan.

Such was the character of the apartment, symbolical of the character of the master.

Mr Aubrey was, as I before said, of a stern, cold nature—a man of intellect, but of that kind of intellect which is occupied with facts—the solid and tangible aspect of things where imagination and fancy have little play and the real business of life is everything.

To a superficial observer it seemed as if he altogether wanted imagination—but unknown to himself, he possessed that faculty in a considerable degree; but it had rarely been indulged, was sedulously kept down, and nothing would have surprised Mr Aubrey more than to be supposed capable of being influenced by it.

Little did he suspect how much imagination had to do with those wide and extended views of ambition which had been the ruling impulse of his life.

How much he was indebted to it for that

power almost of divination into the probable effect of circumstances, which had been the making of his fortune—for that well-ordered and splendid plan of life, which had elevated him to so high a position in society—

Above all, he was unaware how large a part imagination ill directed had been suffered to assume in the guidance of his affections, rendering one of such unblemished rectitude as regarded matters of business,—the partial and unjust parent he had suffered himself to become. This same imagination it was, which, unrestrained, had been allowed to exaggerate with false colouring the good promise, which really was held forth by the one child,—and to deepen the shadows which darkened the character of the other; until under influences such as these, to which he never suspected himself of yielding, Mr Aubrey was in these matters led as far astray as it was possible for the most susceptible of poetic temperaments to have been.

And there he now sits in his ponderous arm-chair—his feet, wrapped in flannel, resting upon a velvet footstool—his forehead shaded by a velvet cap, which partially covers

his as yet scarcely silvered hair, his face pale, and his eye dimmed with sickness—He seems deeply meditating.

His meditations are partly anxious, but for the most part pleasing. The image of his favourite son occupies, as usual, his thoughts—he is dwelling with satisfaction upon the prospect of the projected marriage, and the high, aristocratical family, with which he is about to be connected. Some little drawback to his agreeable contemplations arises, however, from the recollection of certain rather unpleasant rumours which have reached him with respect to the state of the Marquis's affairs. But the anxiety thus occasioned is not very great. He knows there is an immense landed property entailed upon the next heir—so that the embarrassments of the present man might be looked upon as individual, and as in no way tending to impair the stability of the house, with which he is going to be allied.

As regarded the beautiful girl herself, it was plain no money was to be expected with her—but to that Mr Aubrey was indifferent—and, as I have had occasion to observe before, it is astonishing how much the possession of per-

sonal beauty counts for in these wedding calculations. Beauty may be fleeting, and it may be vain, but in the affairs of the great world it seems to be reckoned a more solid and tangible advantage, than the finest mental and moral qualities united, that a woman can possess. For so it is—what can be seen has its superiority unquestioned, so counts far before those higher and more excellent gifts which belong to the region of the *unseen*.

Lady Emma will not bring a shilling—of that Mr Aubrey feels sure. The hope that no money will be asked for must, he understands well enough, be the reason for the inclination shown by both noble parents for the match.

In every respect, save that of money, that beautiful child of fashion had a right to look far higher than to the son of an East India director, however wealthy—but the above consideration altered the case—and it was with no little pride that he felt himself to be standing in a position of more than equality with the long-descended man of title.

The rich and independent man will always look down upon the poor and embarrassed man, be that man peer, king, or kaiser.

With an injustice, for which, indeed there is not the possibility of furnishing an excuse, this father of two sons was, at this identical moment, according to that love of perfecting his plans, of making things square, as he called it, which was the besetting sin of his life, engaged in considering how much of the portion, once intended to be set apart for his second son, under the supposition that his eldest might, as a matter of course, look to marry some young lady, with her from twenty to fifty thousand pounds—how much, I say, of this portion, which he had mentally reserved for William, might be diminished, so as to cover the deficiency as regarded Edward.

For, certainly, if Edward married the portionless daughter of a nobleman, something must be done to compensate the said deficiency, or he might not find himself that wealthy, powerful head of a house which his father had always intended he should be.

A larger provision for his younger children must be made, or the estate, it was plain, might eventually be hampered and embarrassed.

His own younger son would be plentifully

provided for with two-thirds or half of what had been originally intended; a large portion compared with what his son's sons, Edward's younger children, supposing there were a good many of them, would enjoy.

It matters not to specify exactly how great the sacrifice was that Mr Aubrey was preparing to make, as respected his second son's expectations, but that he was, at this identical moment of time, engaged in considering and calculating that very subject, I can take upon myself to affirm.

When—

The door opened and a servant appeared.—

Oh fate!—oh providence!—oh world!—changing—changing world!

Vast events, linked by such minute, almost invisible, chains!—Small—small door—opening to such a new, wide, awfully changed perspective!

A letter—an entrance unlooked for—a pebble stone in a street—such are the insignificant title pages to that Sybil's book, altogether unthought of and astounding, which alters the world's history.

The door opened, and a servant entered.

It was only John, the under footman, in his morning undress livery, and with his unmeaning foolish face, that presented himself; he only uttered a few simple words.

Mr Vincent, from the bank of A. B. C. D., and Co., asked to speak with Mr Aubrey, for a few moments, if he was disengaged.

A very common occurrence this, for the business carried on between Mr Aubrey and these, his confidential bankers, was extended and complicated.

A very common occurrence this.

Mr Aubrey merely said—

“Beg Mr Vincent to be so good as to step up.”

And awaited his entrance with perfect composure.

The head clerk of the firm of Messrs. A. B. C. D., and Co., was a pale, thin, intelligent-looking man, bearing, upon a face of great regularity of feature, an unmistakeable expression of the right and the pure and the true, mingled with great calmness and self-possession.

Such, at least, was the usual character of that interesting countenance, but now the calmness was no longer there, the self-possession was changed into a strange nervousness, and a slight hectic colour was upon the usually pale cheek.

“Pray take a chair, Mr Vincent,” said the Indian director to the banker’s clerk—“Excuse me, you see how I am crippled.” Mr Vincent bowed, and seated himself close by the large table upon which Mr Aubrey’s left arm was leaning—and he too, rested his hand upon the table, and stooped a little forward, as if in act to speak in a low and confidential manner.

But he spoke not.

Something seemed greatly to embarrass him. It appeared as if he wanted words to begin.

At last, still silent, he put his hand into his side pocket, and drew out thence the memorandum-book in which he was accustomed to carry his papers.

“Well, sir,” said Mr Aubrey with some dignity.

He now observed something unusual about Mr Vincent, though betrayed by such slight indications.

“ Well, sir?”

“ Mr Aubrey—sir—The gentlemen of the house have requested me to call upon you—with regard to a somewhat—a somewhat—extra—unusual business—as relates to your dealings with them—”

“ My dealings, sir!—What can you mean?”

“ I beg your pardon, Mr Aubrey—that is not perhaps the proper term to use—but I am hurried and nervous—I must beg of you to excuse me, if I do not express myself with propriety.”

Mr Vincent paused a little, as if considering with himself—then, stooping still forwarder, so as to approach more nearly to Mr Aubrey’s ear, he said,—

“ Mr Aubrey has been always so considerate, so more than considerate as regards our house—that the transaction of this morning—fills the gentlemen of the firm with a sentiment of pain and surprise—not to say—doubt—yet—that—that must be impossible!—I beg your pardon . . . but . . . ”

“ Sir,” said Mr Aubrey, with grave astonishment, “ what *can* you be driving at. I should hope there has been nothing in my

transactions as regards your house, either during the present week, or any week whatsoever preceding it, which can be calculated to arouse feelings of pain and surprise in any man.—Doubt!—I am at a loss to conceive what *that* word can mean, as applied to me?”

“I beg your pardon, sir—I beg your pardon sincerely—no offence, I assure you, is or can be intended—but in a matter so altogether at variance with Mr Aubrey’s usual habits of proceeding,—to your kind and considerate attention as regards us—the gentlemen of the house think it best”

“Pray, sir, let us come to the gist of the matter at once,” Mr Aubrey said rather impatiently.—“All these preliminaries confound me,—I am totally at a loss to conceive what you can be driving at.”

The only answer Mr Vincent made to this speech, was to open his pocket-book and present a cheque—or rather a piece of note paper, written over in the form of a cheque—and for fifteen thousand pounds. It was signed by Mr Aubrey, and endorsed at the back—Edward Aubrey, R.N.,—in Captain

Aubrey's somewhat stiff and copy-like-looking hand.

The first exclamation of Mr Aubrey was one of indignant surprise. But, as the banker's clerk, with a face from which all colour had now departed, and a trembling hand, pointed to the endorsement—the unhappy father turned deadly pale and sank back in his chair.

So he remained for a short period of time. Yet it was astonishing how rapidly this man, prompt in emergency and accustomed throughout the course of his life to deal with the most astounding changes and surprises, came to himself and recovered his power of thought and action.

Raising himself upright from the cushions on which he had sunk back,—he said, composedly—“It is all right—the cheque, I presume, has been duly honoured. Did you not receive my advice of it?”

“Not a syllable of advice,” answered the clerk, eyeing Mr Aubrey with extreme astonishment, forgetting all ordinary formalities in his extasy of surprise,—

“Then you *really* drew the cheque?”

“Sir!”—said Mr Aubrey.

That one little monosyllable so spoken was enough—both men were at once in their relative places again.—

After a short pause Mr Aubrey thus proceeded—speaking with calmness, though with some little apparent difficulty, and his cheek the colour of death.

“I am sorry no advice of this reached you—but you see how I am situated—dependent upon the attention of others, the letter of advice has, I see, not been delivered, and my—my son’s ignorance of business I hope this has been no inconvenience,—the wealth and stability of your house assure me of that,—but I am sorry sorry it should have happened so. When was the bill presented?”

“About an hour ago. The cheque was not crossed, you see—and though the signature at the bottom of the cheque”

“My hand-writing has a good deal altered in consequence of my illness,” observed Mr Aubrey.

“Although yet the endorsement rendered it Still the circumstances

of the case were so unusual, that Mr A., the partner at that time in the house, begged the gentleman who presented it—a somewhat too well known character, I believe—to sit down whilst I made the best of my way to you to ascertain whether the paper ought to be honoured or not.”

“A somewhat too well known character—the presenter of the cheque !

“Who, and what is he ?”

“A Mr Crawley.”

“Crawley:—I don’t recollect hearing that name before.”

“Possibly not, sir,—most likely not,—yet he is a man but too well known.”

“As how ?” asked Mr Aubrey.

And the arm which rested upon the writing table began to twitch and tremble.

“Mr Crawley is a man but too well known in certain circles of this great town.”

“As what ? As what ?”

“As a professed and most successful gambler,” Mr Vincent said, lowering his voice.

There was a low stifled groan in answer—that was all.

Then—

“ You will please to direct that the cheque shall be honoured—It is all right—”

The last sentence added as if he were choking.

Presently—

“ I think my actual balance in your hands is large enough to cover it—if not, accommodate me thus far—the needful shall be paid in to-morrow.”

The banker's clerk remained sitting there, as if stupefied with surprise, literally nailed to his chair.

“ Good morning, sir,” began Mr Aubrey, as if desiring to end the conference.

It was all he could utter; and, it was with the greatest effort that he spoke at all,—and it cost him a thousand times greater effort to maintain even the appearance of composure.

“ Good morning, sir.”

And Mr Vincent was compelled to rise.—He took his leave, without saying a word more.

Mr Vincent returned to the bank of Messrs A. B. C. and D., and entered the sitting room

where two of the partners stood engaged in talking over this most disagreeable affair, as it appeared to them.

In fact they had, neither of them, the least doubt that the cheque was forged; and they anticipated a thousand unpleasant consequences as likely to ensue from the transaction.

As regarded the endorsement upon the back, there was a difference of opinion.—One of the partners affirming that it was certainly the hand of Captain Aubrey, to which indeed it bore the closest resemblance—the other doubting it.

Mr Crawley had been requested to give the name of the gentleman from whom he had received the cheque; but this he politely refused at present to do, saying, and with appearance of reason enough, that unless the cheque were dishonoured by Mr Aubrey, he saw no necessity for further inquiry as to the matter.

Meantime, apparently at his ease, he patiently awaited the result of the appeal to the father.

The cheque was forged, or it was not. He

had not himself much doubt, that forged it was, and by Captain Aubrey.

He had received it in payment from Lord Algernon—under the same cover with Mr Embury's cheque, and he doubted not that it had been accepted by the young nobleman under similar circumstances.

It was rumoured that Captain Aubrey had lost a very large sum at Ascot, and this had doubtless been his means of payment.

After all, it was possible, that the rich and indulgent father might have given his son the money; but upon the worst supposition, namely, that the paper was not strictly regular, and that the young man had made unjustifiable use of his father's name, Mr Crawley felt himself equally safe. Mr Aubrey might have refused to pay his son's gambling debts; but, rather than expose him to the fearful consequences of a forgery, he would undoubtedly honour the cheque at once.

So Mr Crawley felt himself perfectly comfortable as regarded his own part of the affair; and walked up and down with his hands in the pockets of his short, square frock coat, examining the engravings upon

the walls of the back parlour in which he had been invited to wait, with an air of the utmost tranquillity.

Little elated with his winnings was he. He never thought of realising, but was going to fling the whole again into fortune's wheel, to be at some imaginary time drawn out for good. And so, as he sauntered up and down appearing to be examining the prints, which after all he never saw, he whistled a low whistle, that was scarcely a tune.

At last the door opened, the cashier appeared,—and took his receipt for fifteen thousand pounds sterling—paid in ten notes of one thousand—and ten of five hundred pounds.

CHAPTER V.

A poor blind Sampson

Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel.

LONGFELLOW.

MR VINCENT had departed,—

Mr Aubrey sat perfectly still for a considerable time. Not one single muscle of his body stirred, as he rested leaning back upon the cushions of his chair. Save some very slight twitches in the face, he was perfectly motionless.

Such was the manner in which this man, so well experienced in life, had habituated himself to subdue and master any extraordinary emotion—for his temperament was nervous, though his frame was so firmly knit—and the body responded fearfully to mental impressions, whatever the heart might do. His nerves he knew well would, upon occasions such as this,

tremble and prove treacherous unless controlled by a strong will—and his first effort was always directed towards subduing them, and becoming master of himself again.

So thus he remained quite still until the agony had somewhat abated. Then he stretched forth his hand and pulled the bell-rope, which was fastened to his chair.

And John, in his undress livery and with his foolish unmeaning face, again appeared.

“Bring me a glass of warm water”—which was in due time brought.

“Give me that bottle.”

“Blockhead! The one on the right hand there.”

And this was the only slight sign of impatience which appeared. Mr Aubrey poured out some of the sol volatile—his hand shook so much whilst doing so that he could scarcely effect the little operation. He completed it, however, swallowed the draught, and then inquired—

“Is Captain Aubrey within?—Ask him to have the goodness to step up to me.”

The servant returned in a few minutes with—“Captain Aubrey is out, sir.”

“ Out ! When is he expected to come in ? — Desire his servant to let him know as soon as he returns that I wish to speak with him immediately.”

“ He is not expected to return, I believe, sir. His servant went out with him late yesterday evening, he had his carpet bag with him.”

“ I wish to speak to Saunderson.”

“ Saunderson is not come back, sir,— there was some talk in the servant’s hall of the Captain being gone abroad.”

“ Send Gregson up to me,—and leave the room, sir, if you please—what do you stand staring for there ?”

“ I beg your pardon, sir,—I thought you looked so ill,—shall I”

“ What business is it of yours, you rascal, how I look ? Do you hear ?—Send Gregson immediately to me.”

And the poor terrified footman sneaked out of the room.

The wretched father remained alone.

His two thin withered hands were clasped

together—his head thrown back—his eyes uplifted.

Not to seek help and succour from above, poor man!—that was far from him at the moment,—that casting up of the eyes in his agony is instinctive—a mute appeal of nature, as it would seem, to the author of nature! Animals cast up their eyes when about to expire.

“Gone!—Gone abroad!”

“Well might he fly. Well might he seek refuge where all dishonourable scoundrels seek refuge. Well might he dread to meet his father’s face—that father so ungratefully, so cruelly treated.”

The door opened, and Gregson appeared.

An old, grey-headed, confidential servant was he,—one of those rare dependants upon a family, who, entering it from their earliest youth, have there remained gradually rising step by step to the situation of highest confidence and responsibility within the little circle.

He came in, hurried and hesitating, with a stooping gait, for age had laid its heavy hand upon him, and, moreover, he was alarmed at

the account poor, stupid John had given of his master, that worthy having thus announced Mr Aubrey's orders.

"Heigh, Mr Gregson, master's a-wanting you—he's all in a fuss like, and the gout 'll be on his stomach in no time, if it's not looked to—I see that, partly because he's so pale and faint like, and partly because he's fiercer than a lion."

All this whilst Gregson was hastily putting on his coat, before going up stairs.

"What's the matter?—something's amiss, do you say?"

Repeated the old man, fumbling to get his arms into his sleeves, in which operation he was sadly retarded by nervous tremour,

"What do you say, John?—Master ill—what's brought this on, I wonder?"

"Why, I only told him as how the Captain was off for the continent last night, as we all thought, you know, and it seemed to strike him all of a heap—and first he went red, and then as white as a sheet—and then he flew into a passion with me, because I just dropped that I thought he warn't looking well—and—"

But Gregson had got on his coat, and

was hastening up stairs before John had finished.

“Well-a-day,” said stupid John, “to think of the troubles those great folks *do* make for themselves. I wonder the Captain couldn’t just ha’ dropped one line to advertise his father that he was on the tramp. To my thinking Mr Aubrey’s taking it very badly—he’s got a stab at the heart like—and who knows if this same Captain mayn’t have brought on gout i’th’ stomach, and just killed his father outright. I wouldn’t ha’ played my poor old father such a trick, no, not for any thing.”

“I hope nothing’s the matter, sir,” began Gregson, with the privilege of an old and trusted servant, “I hope you are not worse, Mr Aubrey. What shall I get for you?”

“Nothing, thank you, old Gregson—I sent for you to ask you whether what that fool below tells me, is true; that Captain Aubrey left home last night for the continent,”—then, seeing a look of dismay, as he thought, upon the old servant’s face, Mr Aubrey added—“I

knew he was about to travel, but he did not intend to have set forward so soon. How do you know he is gone abroad?—And where is Saunderson?—Did he go with his master?—Tell me all about it.”

This was said with an apparent composure that half imposed upon old Gregson.

“The Captain’s servant carried up two letters, which came by the two-penny post—and directly afterwards he comes running down in a mighty fuss, into the boot-house, because as how—he is but an idle chap, sir, that Saunderson, I’m afraid—and so the Captain’s boots, which ought to have been cleaned in the morning, and been carried up, were all *to be done*. It’s too much the way with those young fellows.”

“Well—well—and so—?”

“And so, sir, he calls to John, and begs him, for love or money, to get ’em cleaned instanter—while I,” says he, “run up and do master’s packing—for he’s off like a shot for Ostende.—”

“Go on.”—

“‘The packet sails at ten o’clock, and it’s near nine now,’ says he, ‘and Master’s afraid

he'll be too late, and he told me to toss a thing or two into his carpet bag, and that was all he should want.' And so, sir, Saunderson hurried up stairs again, and then down for the boots, and sends out for a cab—and they're off in no time—and I heard the Captain tell the man to drive for dear life, and if he was in time for the packet he would give him a sovereign."

"And he left no note—no message for me?"

"No, sir, not a word, as I heard."

"Go and inquire whether there is nothing left for me—No—stay—make no inquiries . . . if there had been anything I should have had it before now.—No doubt he will write from Ostende.

"You may go, Gregson—"

As the old man remained standing there, looking wistfully at his master.

"You may go—"

"But, sir—Mr Aubrey—"

"No—the pain is subsiding.—A sort of spasm, that was all.—Go along, my poor fellow—I will ring if I feel worse."

Unwillingly the old man turned away, but

he knew his master well; he dared not offer the ministrations even of a heart so faithful as his, when thus ordered from the room.

So he left it, drawing the door slowly and reluctantly after him.

And then the stern, cold Aubrey—having thus exerted himself to hide, as he thought, the disgrace of his son—gave way. He covered his face with his hands, and the tears streamed through his fingers.

The paroxysm was violent, but it was short—tears were strange, unaccustomed visitors to those eyes.—It was a first confession of weakness—a tribute to the love passing words, which, from a mere child, he had felt for this favoured boy.

The ingratitude of a child subdues the strongest heart. The bravest and most manly spirit breaks down before that blow, the force of which none but a parent can understand. Ah! bitterer than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!

Poor Lear!

His little wits were shattered by it.

The grief that could subdue Mr Aubrey to tears was one as intense in its kind—

He wept bitterly—alone—unheeded—unseen. He *could* weep—and so far it was well for him.

But the paroxysm was soon over. Impatiently he brushed the evidence of weakness from his eyes, and his countenance was again composed—but with a sterner composure than ever.

“And this is the return,” the father mentally exclaimed, “for a partiality so great!—Alas! Alas! . . . This is the return!—Contempt for my advice, neglect of my wishes—inveterate habits of gambling, terminating in a mean and dishonourable crime.

“And what had I done to merit this want of confidence?—Why could he not come to me?—I had only been too indulgent.—Why could he not come at once—confess his fault, and rely upon my assistance . . . Had I ever denied him anything?—And he must have recourse to this cowardly meanness!—Rob me—rather than beg from me! I little deserved it.

“ But the other—

“ Why, wretch that I am ! was I not this very morning planning to benefit this ungrateful son—at the expense of that other, from whom I have never met anything but the most dutiful consideration and respect.

“ I should have thought better of this—I have been partial and unjust.—The folly of man perverteth his ways, and then he is astonished at the misery of his own creation.

“ Well—it is thrice well, when punishment comes not too late . . . I kiss the rod.

“ Henceforth this one shall be as nothing to me.

“ Thank God ! I have another son.”

LORD ALGERNON MORDAUNT TO CAPTAIN AUBREY.

“ If you ever loved or cared for me—if you have the slightest atom of the love you affect for Emma—sweet Emma!—who loves me as her own soul—save me now—I am in difficulties, into which you have helped to plunge me, and from which you, and you alone, can rescue an old friend. I have not time for explanations—if I had, I dared not trust them to

paper. Come to me—sail by the Ostende packet, which goes off at ten to-night, and meet me at Bruges. Go to a little obscure inn called *Le Cerf aux Abois*, in that street, I forget its name, which runs to the left after you have passed the clock tower; there wait till I come to you. But as you value everything that is dear in existence, say not a word good, bad, or indifferent to any one before you leave London upon the subject of this scrawl. It will be time enough for explanations, heaven knows! when we have met. I adjure you in Emma's name to do this. If I knew a stronger under heaven to conjure by I would use it."

Such were the contents of a hurried scrawl which was put into Captain Aubrey's hands the evening of that day upon which Lord Algernon sailed. This was the note which Gregson had mentioned. Edward too well guessed the nature of the difficulties in which his friend was involved, though little aware of their full extent. He understood, too, the pride of that haughty nature, so impatient of disgrace, though so reckless in

conduct; and he determined, without a moment's hesitation, to yield to his friend's entreaty, and fly to his assistance.

Inadvertently he had dropped the words "Ostende packet" when urging his man to make haste; and he was so pressed for time—so agitated and distressed by the thoughts which crowded into his mind, that he flung himself into the cab, without once thinking of the attention which was due to his father.

In his excuse, it may be said that he had for so many years been in the habit of acting for himself upon the spur of the occasion, without feeling accountable to any one for his proceedings, that it was natural enough, in the present agitation of his spirits, that he should forget there was any one to whom some explanation, to account for his sudden departure, ought to be made.

When he arrived upon the quay, the packet was about to steam away, and those preliminary puffs and noises were heard, which warn the traveller that delay is inadmissible. Edward snatched his carpet-bag from his servant, and hastened on board; and the

man, being thus left at perfect liberty to amuse himself as he pleased; and having his quarter's wages in his pocket, which happened to have been paid that morning, thought he could not do better than pass a little time in enjoying himself; so he entered an omnibus, and away he went; and vanishes for the present into darkness, as Carlyle would say.

CHAPTER VI.

My life is weariness to me ;

I wish the glare of daylight o'er,

And when the sun sets in the sea,

I pray he ne'er may wake me more.

For nought brings pleasure, change, or cheer,

'Tis all the same—blank, cold, and drear.

MRS ACTON TINDAL.

“I AM glad you are come in, sir—my master doesn't seem well.”

This sentence greeted William, as, with a gloomy countenance, he entered his father's house—crossed to the back hall, laid his hat upon the table, and, hastily brushing away the hair that fell heavily clustering over his pale forehead, was passing on to go up stairs, and to his own room.

It was but the morning before, that Edward had communicated to his father the intelligence of what had passed between him and Lady Emma, and had received his hearty congratulations upon his happiness.

Mr Aubrey had afterwards mentioned the

subject to his other son, doing so in his ordinary indifferent manner, at the time William entered his dressing-room to make his usual call of inquiry before going out for the morning.

Little was he aware of the dagger he was thus quietly planting in his second son's heart. It was plain that neither father nor brother had the slightest suspicion of the state of William's affections, and so far it was well. This conviction was his only consolation, and he treasured it as his last remaining comfort.

He had battled with himself, and conquered so far—even the slightest indication, by which his secret might have been betrayed, had been kept down by the strength of his own determined will. He had forced himself to receive the intelligence with apparent calmness, and to offer his congratulations with an air of cordiality, which he had the satisfaction to see imposed upon every one. So far it was well.

“Ay—so far it is well,” his heart had said, as, exhausted by this conflict with his feelings, he had at length escaped up stairs, and had flung himself face downwards upon the couch that stood by his dressing-room fire.

“Oh yes! it is well; and better—better—better far will it be when this heart has altogether ceased to beat. Yes, thank God—it’s broken—It gave way. I felt it when I offered him my hand, and hoped he would be happy. I smiled—I believe I smiled. Yes—it gave way then. Emma!—Emma!—”

Incoherently these sentences burst from him.

Soliloquy, though rare in actual life, is at times the vent of feelings strained beyond the power of endurance. It is probably the first step towards delirium, where all self-mastery is about to be lost. So at least it went with this unhappy man, a prey to passions, the external exhibition of which had been repressed with so desperate an effort. Nature had yielded at last, and thus he lay, mingling these wild exclamations with his heavy groans and tears.

He was almost as unused to tears as his father; but they fell, scalding and nearly blinding him now.

The fire blazed and crackled cheerfully, in strange contrast with this terrible agony of despair. But everything else around seemed still; for his was a back room, and you heard

only the distant rumble of London, which resembled the unbroken roar of an ever-flowing river. In the best room, indeed, into which the dressing-room opened, a low, creaking noise, as of one stepping softly about, and the sound of drawers being opened and shut, might be heard.

This noise had ceased as he rushed into the room, flung himself upon the sofa, and groaned and wept aloud—and presently, at the half-open door, a figure might be seen, standing with finger upon lip, as if imposing silence, though no one else was present. The figure was that of Alice, and she continued to stand there in the doorway; and as she stood, her countenance became darker and darker, with a mingled expression of sympathy, pain, anger, and the deepest disappointment.

So she remained motionless, but with an expression of the greatest misery upon her face, until the fatal name burst forth, with that fierce and bitter cry—and then the tears gathered thickly to her eyes, and stepping forward, as if by a sudden impulse, she laid her hand upon William's shoulder, and said,

“For Heaven’s love—don’t—don’t take on so.”

He started up—kindling with shame and rage.

“Woman!—what brought you here?”

She eyed him with a melancholy expression.

Melancholy and reproachful at once. Her look seemed to say, “Have I not a right?—I, who love you more than life.”

He could not be insensible to that mournful, wistful look, and his heart softened towards her, as sitting down upon the sofa, from which he had started, he said with as much gentleness as he could command—

“But, mammy, you should not surprise me in this way.”

“He calls me mammy still,” answered her heart.

Her voice uttered humbly these few words,

“I only came to bring in your clothes from the wash, and put them by in your drawers as usual. You know Mr Jones lets me do that for you—I do it tidier, and I like to do it. I heard you groaning, and thought you were ill. I beg your pardon”—with another of those strange, unintelligible looks that were often

seen upon her face—"I know my place—I'm only your poor nurse—I don't forget—you take care I shan't forget."

"You are the only person who cares for me in the world," he said taking her hand, and making her sit down by him, "*that* I know—but Alice, you should not do this—you should not peep through key-holes and door chinks and spy me out in this way—there are moments in every man's life which should pass only between himself and his God—no human eye should witness such—not even the most loving one."

"Key-holes and door chinks," she repeated, looking much hurt, and letting go his hand. "You must have a strange opinion of me if you think me capable of such mean tricks as those — peeping and listening, like a vile, curious menial, eh?—Key-holes and door chinks—'and a Syrian was my father,'" she added, drawing herself up with a certain pride.

"Dear Alice, don't be offended—I meant no such thing. I am sure I did not intend to hurt you. I know you are far above the base tricks too common with those of your class.—

I am sure you would scorn to peep or to listen to gratify any idle curiosity—or for the sake of your own advantage—but your love for me blinds you—I do not like to be watched in my moments of weakness,—not even by you, my good nurse—my foster-mother—so don't do it again, please.”

Once more those dark, deep eyes, were fixed upon him with a wild yearning look—but she said nothing more.

She continued to sit in silence by his side, and at last her hand slowly, almost as if in spite of herself, moved along, till it touched his, and got possession of it again; and then she seemed to gather courage, as this little familiarity was not, as was sometimes the case, repulsed, and she said:

“You are very miserable, aren't you?”

“Pretty well for that”—trying to assume an air of levity.

“You love that woman still, in spite of all—”

“And shall, whilst I have breath. Hear me, Alice, I did not intend—I hoped to have died as I hoped to live, with this secret lying hidden in my breast—killing me there by

inches—unsuspected by any one,—but you have found me out, good nurse; and why should I affect mystery with you. Perhaps He, who alone knows the utter desolation of this heart, has raised me up one friend, to whom I may speak—one comforter who will neither embitter, nor scorn.”

She bent down her head, humbly touched with her lips the hand which she held, gently pressing it as she did so—but she lifted not up her face again, and he went on—

“Yes, Alice, it is vain to attempt to conceal it from you. I love her—Love her!—the word means nothing—everybody talks of love. Every fool thinks himself in love—I don’t know, perhaps, it may be as bad with them as with me—we all think our own case the worst. . . . And she is to be my brother’s wife!”—he burst forth with fresh agony—then restraining himself again, he went on more quietly—“I scarcely know how it will be with me—I can’t understand it very well—I shall try to get along as well as I can—perhaps I may be able to do it—perhaps not. Alice, if upon the morning that makes those two one—or may be a week after—a swollen corpse is

fished up from the Serpentine and carried to the dead-house to be owned—don't own it—you'll know well enough whose it is, Alice—don't own it, but steal it—steal it—get somebody to steal it and carry it away, and bury it under that tree by the rivulet where you used to sit, whilst I sailed my boats. I remember it all as if it were but yesterday."

"And you love her so,—I was not aware how much," she said, raising up her head and showing a face in which the sweetness of ineffable feelings mingled with an air of the greatest determination—"You love her so that you cannot, cannot, be happy without her."

"Happy!—Ask me, if I can *live* without her!"

"Then you shall have her—she likes you; that I know—and if this brother of yours had not come in your way . . ."

"Say that again—It is what I say to myself—What was it you were saying?"

"That she likes you—that I am sure she does—and that you are the man, you, William, that really suit her best. Trust *me*, my dear . . . Sir—I beg your pardon—only trust to me."

“Oh, nonsense! what vain nonsense this is!”

And he shook his head half mournfully, half impatiently.

“Don’t let that Captain have her, William—why should not you be happy as soon as he?—You love her ten millions of times better than he ever did, or ever can—It’s not in him—he’s a good-natured, warm-hearted, pleasant fellow enough—but you—my William—” and her eyes sparkled—“but what are you?”

“Not one made to please a woman’s eye,” he answered.

“Ah! you little understand women—you little know them—you think a fair coloured cheek, and a handsome blue eye, and a gay and gallant address are all in all with women—you little know them.—Foolish and proud they may be—but after all it is the *man* they seek—the character that makes the man—mind and strength, and seriousness, and real passion.—That’s what they love.—Fond fools! they often mistake.—They fancy they find what they admire—they worship the counterfeit—but when the true thing really comes

—oh—then—then, then it's a different affair, William Aubrey."

And she pressed his hand again, and then she rose, and stood before him as she was going away, and said expressively, "Have patience—only have patience."

The remainder of that day had passed, he scarcely knew how. In after years, when he had once or twice endeavoured to recal these desperate hours, his recollection was too indistinct, it was all one black confused scene of misery.

He put little or no faith in the assurances of his nurse—they were to him but idle words, yet the affection this strange, vehement woman cherished for him, the deep intense devotion, expressed in every word and gesture, was a kind of comfort in the midst of his wretchedness.

It was impossible not to be moved by these humble and passionate assurances of a love which was as a mother's love, and indeed the affection of a foster nurse is much of the same

nature—and he, who had never known tenderness from his true mother, felt all this the more.

This was the only feeling that could in the least sweeten the desolate bitterness of his heart, and it was but a faint and ineffectual remedy.

He remained moodily sitting upon the little couch after she was gone, in a sort of stupefaction, of utter despondency—quite done up for that day.

At last he rose from his place, staggering about as if he could hardly stand, took his hat, went down stairs and let himself out by the front door. It was by this time dark. So he wandered about the streets, and through the lonely Park. The whole evening and the following night had thus been spent—he did not come home at all, but no one missed, or inquired after him, until Mr Aubrey's increased illness having alarmed old Gregson, he had gone up to Mr William's room, to ask him to come down; and not finding him there, had waited uneasily—now going to his master's door to listen—now to the door of the house to look out—till at last William appeared, slowly approaching up the street.

He passed through the open door without seeming to notice Gregson, who stood there watching him come up, and was beginning to ascend the stairs, when the old man followed, and stopped him with,

“I am glad you are come in, sir—Master does not seem well.”

“What’s the matter?—Where’s my brother?—With him, of course. Nothing much amiss, I hope?”

He, however, mounted the stairs, rapidly, and turned towards his father’s dressing-room.

He knocked at the door.—

His father’s voice answered by the usual “come in”—and two as miserable men as the earth held that day, met each other. They were both looking wretchedly, and both shocked at each other’s appearance.

William started back—Mr Aubrey leaned forwards.

“What is the matter?” was exclaimed on both sides.

“My dear sir, you look ill—”

“William, you look dreadfully—”

“What has happened?”

“What is the matter?” -

William's face was wan and pale—he was exhausted by the pain he had endured during the past hours, the passionate indulgence of feelings so rarely indulged at all; but in Mr Aubrey the very foundations of life seemed to have been sapped, and he had the air of a man who would never recover from the blow he had received. He was, however, the first to speak again.

Sinking back into his chair, he said, in a hollow voice—

“Why need I ask?—I see by your face that you know all.”

“All, sir!—I know nothing—I left you but yesterday, rejoicing in the prospect of your eldest son's happiness—I find you now very ill, and it is evident that mental distress is the cause of this illness—but I know nothing and have heard nothing—”

“Have you seen your brother—Captain Aubrey?”

“No, sir.”

“Heard nothing of him?”

“No—why do you ask?—what has happened?”

“Where have you been all this time, that you two have not, as it seems, met since yesterday morning?”

“I left Edward in your room when I went out—Since then I have not been much at home—I was not well—I have been trying to walk it off.”

“You look very ill, William. You say that my face bears the traces of great mental pain—I am sure yours does.—Are you unhappy too, my son?”

Mr Aubrey had never in his life before spoken to his second son with so much tenderness. The tone melted William. In his present softened and exhausted state he was peculiarly alive to kindness, and this was quite unexpected. He sat down upon a chair that stood opposite to his father, and gently passing his handkerchief over his brow, to wipe away the moisture which the fever of pain had brought there, he said,

“We have all our turn, sir—I am not particularly happy—Why should I be?”

“Why should you, indeed?” was the answer, quite unlike the harsh, reproving tone that used to meet any expression of this kind.

Remorse was beginning to make itself felt in the father's heart. "What sacrifice," he went on, "*has* ever been made to your happiness—yet you are well conducted, honourable, and dutiful. Whilst others! . . . I have done you injustice, William—great injustice," he continued with energy, "and here I beg your pardon—and thus"—and as he spoke he hastily opened a small drawer in the table close by him—"and thus I revoke one of my acts of injustice—"

And taking out a folded paper, he deliberately tore it in pieces and flung it into the fire, and

"Would to God," he said, "I could as easily destroy every vestige of former error."

William started forwards. He thought his father was raving. He made a gesture, as if to arrest the hand that was tearing up the Will—for it was his Will that Mr Aubrey was destroying.—But his father pushed him impatiently aside—"Nay—nay—let me do it—You have often enough interfered to shield him from the consequences of my displeasure—and blind fool that I was!—I could not even draw the inference!—but it is done now.—William, henceforward look upon your-

self as my only son and heir—for I have no other!”

“Good heavens!—sir, what can you mean? My brother!—Edward!—what has happened—No accident—Heaven of heavens!”

“Oh, be calm!” said Mr Aubrey, bitterly—“I have not been fated to lose my boy by an accident—such as a rearing horse, and his head smashed against the curb stone!—I, who have so doatingly trusted, have met with my deserts—it was right I should—and lose my son in an altogether different manner—William, your brother is a scoundrel, and I have done with him for ever.”

William’s face underwent a change, paler it could scarcely be, yet paler it grew—it became wan to blackness—but his eyes, those deep, expressive eyes, shot forth a strange light. Hope, irrepressible hope, was swelling in his breast—yet he was no demon—he was excessively shocked at his father’s speech.

“Impossible, sir!” it was his first impulse to exclaim, “Edward is incapable of anything that is really wrong.”

“Oh!” replied Mr Aubrey, bitterly, “when

a man once takes to the turf and the hazard table, and associates with rascal gamblers, it is not easy to say what wrong or not he may be capable of."

"But Edward—I thought him, I believed him to be the very reverse of all this—the very soul of honour."

"I do not profess to understand exactly what the young men of the present day mean by honour—to forge his father's name—and endorse the cheque for fifteen thousand pounds—and then, like a coward, skulk away to the continent! . . . Such things may be very consistent with a gambler's notions of honour, for anything I know, or, for anything I care."

"I do not understand you,"—and William again looked anxiously at his father, as if he doubted his being in the possession of his senses.

"Pray, sir, compose yourself—I am at a loss to conceive what all this means."

"I am composed enough," Mr Aubrey answered, with some displeasure, "You need not look at me in this manner—Do you suppose—were you green enough to imagine that

a man who spent his nights in gambling, and was hand and glove with such men as Stanhope and Crawley, would not speedily become capable of anything. I was deceived in him—but I was an old doting fool—but you, William—I thought you must have known him better.”

He fixed his eyes a few moments upon his younger son, and then proceeded, slowly and emphatically—

“You *did* know him better. I thought you envious and jealous—I despised, and almost hated you for it. Now I understand it all—and here is my hand—William—let it be between you and me as it never yet has been—Justice has her due at last.”

William held out his thin, white, fevered hand, and, still unable to comprehend the true meaning of this strange scene, so unlike his father’s usual way of proceeding, he could scarcely help being confirmed in the belief that his father was raving—his disorder, he thought, might have affected his head. And, possibly, he was not wrong in this suspicion. Mr Aubrey was, certainly, at this time, not quite master of himself—the shock he had received had been too great. It is doubted, by many, whether,

from that time to the day of his death, he was ever quite the same man again.

He seemed to dwell morbidly upon the injustice of which he felt himself guilty—and he certainly behaved with a severity to his offending son, which it is difficult to reconcile with the blind and partial affection he had, till then, indulged. No doubt the recollection of his past indulgence added to the bitterness of his resentment.

Whether he loved William any better than he had done before is not quite certain, but, henceforth, he seemed to consider him as occupying the place of his brother, and maintained him in it with the same exclusive interest which had before rested upon Edward.

“From this time then”—he went on, grasping his son’s hand firmly as he spoke—“from this time then begins a new era for us all—Henceforth all my old purposes and intentions are changed—That ungrateful boy is nothing more to me, and never—whilst I live—so help me God! will I look upon his face again—And here, William—good boy—good son—I constitute you heir

to my estate—Take it.—Take all, and may you be better than he was, and a happier man than ever your father has been.”

“ My dear father !”—William now began, and his eyes were glistening—“ this kindness after the past circumstances of my life gratifies me much—but do not let the blessed feeling be disgraced by self-interested views.—Give my brother your fortune, and to me a portion of your heart—so shall all be right between us.”

“ Your brother !—Do you know what you are saying ? ”

“ Yes, sir—I repeat it—What can Edward have possibly done to forfeit your affection, and those privileges you have always led him to consider as his own.”

“ Aye—aye—my exclusive affection—a pretty return !”

“ What return ? ”

“ Did I not do all I could ? Have I not expostulated—warned him ? Have I not expressed my fears over and over again to you ?—and did you not give me reason to believe that you in some degree shared them ?—and did I not, dotard that I was ! believe you to

be actuated by jealousy—as if a man of your sense could be blinded to his faults as I was? You knew the stuff he was made of all along. No one becomes infamous at once. He must have given proofs of what was in him, to those who could and would see. You must have known what he was capable of long ago, William.”

“Capable of!—capable of, sir!”

“Yes, capable of!—Did I not tell you before? Oh! he was capable of no great crimes—only a forgery—a little venial forgery—committed against his own father.—Why, what child cares to rob his father? Is it not all one? The tradesman’s son robs the till—the young gentleman forges a cheque.—It’s all the same thing.”

“Forges a cheque!—My dear sir!—Excuse me, you seem to be very ill.”

“I do—do I?—Yes, I dare say I look ill enough. I am not a particularly feeling person—but when one is robbed by a son—a son for whom one would have died—a son to whom nothing—nothing was ever refused—aye! that’s, that’s the damning thought of all. If he had only come to me—and confessed it!”

“ I am in confusion—this is a dream, sir—shake it off—shake it off. You are not quite yourself—a disagreeable dream—shake it off. Try to compose yourself—a little sleep, a few hours’ sleep,”—

William kept repeating, rising up in much anxiety, and going to his father, who he now felt convinced was mad.

“ Pray shake it off.”

“ Shake it off!” cried Mr Aubrey, impatiently pushing away his son’s hand. “ Shake it off!—You think me mad, do you?—and well you may. Oh, that I were—mad or dreaming!—but no, no—here it is”—and putting his hand into the side-pocket of his coat, into which it had been hastily thrust, he drew out a crumpled paper, and presented it to William.

William spread it out and examined it.

“ It is a large sum certainly, father,” he said, “ but”—

“ But! Will you never understand?” cried Mr Aubrey. “ Do you see those two signatures—I tell you one is *not* mine—and the other *is* his.”

William could only stand looking aghast,

but as if he still required further explanation.

“Must you?”—Aubrey bitterly went on—“Must you?—will you have it all out in good black and white—in plain, damned words? You shall have them:—Your brother the Captain has forged a cheque upon his father’s banker for fifteen thousand pounds, in order to pay a certain rascal named Mr Crawley, for losses incurred at a particularly nice little game—called hazard!”

“Impossible, sir!—Impossible!—This can’t be. There are things which one ought not to believe even if one saw them done before one’s eyes. Edward has been faulty, and his passion for play is much to be regretted—but this—No, father—this he never did—It is impossible! He never wrote those names—”

“You say so!”—and for a brief moment a gleam of joy broke over the darkness of Mr Aubrey’s soul—“Nay, then!”—but sinking back again, and his countenance growing blacker than ever—“there *can* not be a doubt of it.”

“I will never—never believe it. It is

monstrous! It is an incredible falsehood, invented by some enemy of his—Heaven alone knows why! But I would pledge my existence that it is false. Send for him, sir—send for your son—let him deny this to your face—as I am ready to pledge my soul that he can and will.”

“Send for him!” said Mr Aubrey, with a cruel irony—“Oh! by all means—only he has absconded. He has run away to the continent. Oh, All Merciful!—that I should have lived to see this day!”

“Absconded!”

“Yes, he’s gone—he’s safe!—and his secret, too, is safe. The cheque has been honoured, and his reputation screened. It is true, they took it a little oddly at A.’s—but it’s all hushed up,—vague suspicions, merely—I took care of that. For your sake, and mine, William—one would not blush for a member of one’s own family. Oh, yes! I dare say he will soon return to his profession—Perhaps be a great man still—who knows? An Admiral, maybe, and wear the red ribbon? Have a name in history—who knows?”

“But let him look for nothing more from

me. Once lost, my confidence is gone for ever. This is no boyish trick—no childish extravagance. He is a man—and he wears a fair outside—and he is respected and beloved—and he was about to be received into an honourable house—and to marry the sweetest girl in London—and all the time he has been a wretched associate of blacklegs and gamblers, and a bettor at horse-races, and a dicer at hazard ;—and, worse than all this, staking more than he was worth, and ending in a forgery and a robbery—that's it.

“And now, William, hear me out. Don't interrupt me—I tell you I will not be interrupted,—

“I have done with him for ever—not one penny—not one penny shall he ever touch of mine. He has his profession. And as for that sweet girl, she is not to be had for nothing, or I am somewhat mistaken in her mother. So she is lost to *him*. And who knows but the heir of my estate may come in for the young lady also?

“William, you must pay your addresses to the Lady Emma. I have my reasons for desiring—nay, insisting upon it.”

But William answered not one word.

He looked up sharply into his father's face one quick, penetrating glance, as if to see whether he were really in his senses ; then his head sank upon his breast.

He was speechless.

And at that moment the demon entered into his soul. He was taken by surprise, it is true ; but he ought to have been startled at the flood of iniquitous joy and triumph that rushed over his soul as the star of his destiny was seen to glitter above the horizon—bright but ominous, as the hair of Sirius—and the glorious aspect of his future destiny was displayed before him.

He no longer doubted of his brother's guilt. He gave the point up—he yielded himself to the too irresistible temptation—All the pride—all the ambition—all the envy—all the love—that was in him—every evil passion of his nature—passions which had long lain like slumbering serpents within his bosom—snakes ! to be awakened by the hot beams of the sun, reared up their heads at once !

And so the last state of that man was worse than the first. Forgetting as it seemed the

presence of his father, sinking into a deep reverie, bewildered by this sudden transition from prospects most despairing to extatic hope, there he stood silent and amazed.

Mr Aubrey's voice, at length, aroused him. "What's the matter with you, William? The last mentioned subject seems to have affected you strangely."

William started and lifted up his head.

"She is a sweet girl, in my opinion—but if you are not of that way of thinking, why, there is no absolute necessity . . .—yet I confess I think it would be better so."

"Oh, sir!"

"Well—well—we will talk of that by and by—but what is this—how you look, William—can it be possible—do you love this girl?"

"More than the life here, and the life hereafter!" was the passionate and blasphemous reply.

Mr Aubrey looked at him with astonishment, but all he said was,—

"William! I ought to have known you better"

CHAPTER VII.

She only said, The night is dreary,
He cometh not, she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

TENNYSON.

EDWARD had written a few lines to the Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux upon his return home the night of the races, and had given them in charge of a servant before he went to rest, with orders to ride down to the Holms, at a very early hour the following morning,—and bring him an answer back.

The messenger was to ride post, so that no time might be lost.

In this letter Edward explained his reason for not writing to the father,—laid his proposals before the mother,—briefly stated his expectations,—and concluded with a request to be allowed to come down that morning and endeavour to plead his own cause.

He had waited impatiently for the reply to this missive, and he got it about one o'clock in the afternoon. The Marchioness received his proposals most graciously, and said that she should, immediately upon his return, lay them before the Marquis, adding that she ventured to assure Captain Aubrey, that, without doubt, her husband would view the prospect of this alliance in the same light that she did herself—as one calculated to constitute the happiness of all parties concerned.

Still, as the father had not been consulted, she would suggest that the proposed visit of to-day should be postponed until the morrow, when the Marquis would return, and the whole party would proceed to town. She ended by giving Captain Aubrey an invitation to join them at their house, in the Regent's park, to luncheon the next day.

Edward had been a little disappointed at this arrangement—he was naturally impatient to see his mistress again, but he knew the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux had the reputation of being of a somewhat difficult temper,—and he concluded, and justly enough, that the Marchioness had her own good reasons

for this little piece of etiquette,—which he could not help thinking would otherwise have been unnecessary.

So he settled himself as well as he could to bear this slight disappointment—but, not feeling in the humour for society, instead of sauntering away the morning in the usual manner, first at his club, and then on horse-back in Rotten Row, he ordered his horse early, and sallied forth upon a meditative ride in the direction of Harrow. Whiling away the time in pleasant reverie enough, among the sweet, shady, solitary lanes, by hedges filled with honeysuckles and wild roses, which are still to be found in that direction.

In consequence of this indulgence of a lover's humour, Edward was not seen in town that day ; and instead of coming home to dinner, finding it late when he turned back, and feeling rather indisposed to a tête-à-tête dinner with his brother, he had taken a mutton chop at a hedge row inn, some six or seven miles from London, and had not returned till late. On his entrance into his father's house, he was met by Lord Algernon's letter, which filled him with terrible anxiety.

That something was very much amiss he felt certain,—and his heart smote him for many things that he had done,—more especially for that fatal and restless temper he had indulged, and which had impelled him, in the disorder of his mind, to have recourse to the distraction of that awful hazard table. He could not help feeling that his most unfortunate run of unparalleled good luck had tempted his more daring and unprincipled companion to enter upon that course, which as he feared, to him had proved so ruinous.

Then he bitterly reproached himself for his inconceivable madness and folly at Ascot—which had terminated in obliging him to press Lord Algernon for money that he now began to fear could very ill have been spared,—but far were his worst anticipations from approaching the dreadful truth.

He was, however, impatient beyond measure to reach his friend,—and he determined faithfully to adhere to his directions, and to preserve complete silence as to what had happened,—except so far as regarded two persons,—his father and Lady Emma, to each of whom he wrote hasty notes,—merely

informing the one, namely, his father, that unexpected business had obliged him to cross to the continent, and that he should be absent a few days ;—and to the other, a few passionate lines, leaving it to her to divine on whose, and upon what account he was gone—but offering no further explanation.

These notes had been given to his servant to post, which the fellow forgot to do that night as well as the next morning—being in fact very drunk during the first period of time, and very ill in consequence during the other. When he came to his recollection, it was too late, he thought, to send the letters—which by the date of their arrival would be evidence of his neglect of orders—so he settled that the safest way would be to burn them, and swear he had dispatched them at the proper time.

Accordingly both letters were disposed of in the fire.

The evening that Captain Aubrey left London, Lady Emma with her mother dined out at a house in the neighbourhood of the Holms, where lived some people with whom the Mar-

chioness had but a slight acquaintance. But they were rising people of immense wealth, beginning to *mark* in the world of fashion, and she, who never lost an opportunity of advantaging herself or her family, thought it as well to be upon acquaintance terms with the parvenu Cræsus, and so she had graciously accepted an invitation rather forced upon her, and she and Lady Emma—this last most unwillingly—had set out together for the dinner, and at the amphitryon's house they had accordingly arrived.

It was rather a mixed company that they found assembled in the drawing-room,—an *omnium gatherum* from the races of the preceding day—and there was not one person in the room with whom the Marchioness was acquainted, except the master and the mistress of the house; and, though Lady Emma was too beautiful and distinguished looking to escape observation, and the mistress of the house too impatient to have the dignity of her guests known, not to have her name published immediately, yet there was no one present sufficiently intimate in the circle in which the Hurstmonceauxs moved to suspect in the least

the relations which subsisted between them and Captain Aubrey.

The consequence of this ignorance was, that Emma, sitting demurely there, appearing to listen to the very insipid attempts at conversation made by the young lady of the house—and with her ready wits wandering about the room observing and listening to other things—was fated again to hear, as she had heard at the never-forgotten party where their eyes first met—that name brought up again—which was still in everybody's mouth. The race, of course, was the grand subject matter of discussion—the race of that day, at which our ladies had not been present, was talked over, and the good or ill success of the winners and losers commented upon, but it had furnished nothing remarkable in its incidents, and the subject was let drop, and then people began to speak of what had happened the day before, and to argue the matter of the bets—that is to say, how far, under the circumstances, the losers were bound to pay. Some maintained one thing, some the other. Much might be said upon both sides—Was ever

argument long maintained where this was not the case? People do not contest whether two and two make four.

In support of the different opinions, many names and authorities were quoted—at last a man said,—

“ Well, I know one—and he’s as honourable a man as breathes—but no ninny—and he has paid his bets without hesitating—I saw him myself hand a cheque for five thousand pounds sterling to Stanhope.”

“ Rather a large sum—and you say he paid it without disputing the matter ? ”

“ There was a little palaver about it—that fool Mountford must put his finger into the pie—but it ended by Captain Aubrey acknowledging that he was bound to pay, and giving his cheque for the money.”

Miss Matilda Barton, by her side, might talk till she was hoarse, Lady Emma heard not a syllable henceforth that she uttered. Her attention was riveted upon the conversation that was going on among the two or three gentlemen who were speaking near her, and she heard what follows,—

“ Twelve thousand pounds, did you say ? ”

“No, I said five.”

“Rather a large sum for a youngster like that.”

“Tush, man,—his father is rich as Dives.”

“And as little inclined to throw his money away.”

“But this is his favourite son—he can refuse him nothing.”

“He’d need be his favourite son—if all tales be true,” put in another gentleman, who had not spoken before.

“Tales!—What do you mean? why Edward Aubrey is as excellent a fellow as breathes,” retorted the first speaker warmly.

“May be—may be—I don’t profess to know much about him—only he frequents rather odd places, I’m told—for such an admirable Crichton as the world would give him out to be.”

“Odd places! what can you mean—Odd places!” . . .

“Oh—only odd places for people who aim at perfection. Not odd places as regards their gentility—quite respectable—highly respectable, but a little given to”

“What *can* you mean?”—asked the advo-

cate of Edward Aubrey, in an irritated tone.

“Pooh, Charlton!—Don’t go into a passion about it—a man may have ten thousand good qualities, and be all and everything that you and the rest of the world believe of Captain Aubrey, and yet he may be a little too fond of shaking a certain fascinating machine.”

“You don’t take him for a gambler!” cried the other angrily.

“Why it depends—A professed gambler—a regular blackleg—no—a thousand times, no. But if you mean by gambler, one who wins and loses more than he ought at games of mere chance, and frequents clubs where high play, and nothing short of *very* high play, is the order of the day—why—I don’t like to give ugly names, yet I for my part like to call things by their right ones—so we will call it—what shall we call it?—perhaps better give it no name at all, and let the subject drop.”

“But I won’t let the subject drop—I defy you to prove your words, or rather your insinuations—for what are they but mere insinuations?” cried the other waxing very warm.

“My very good sir,” said his opponent, who was a middle aged man, at least ten years older than Edward Aubrey’s passionate advocate—“The matter is one of perfect indifference to me—and as it seems to have wounded you in one tender point or other—I beg to be excused from pursuing the subject further.”

And with a slight bow he turned upon his heel and went away.

“That is so like him,”—cried the young man impatiently,—“always dropping these sort of obscure hints, that seem to imply a vast deal more than they openly assert—I’ve a great mind to follow him, and tell him to his face that he’s a d——d liar.”

“Don’t do that, my dear sir,” said a young man of his own age, who had been till now a silent observer of what was going on—“for two good reasons—First, he’ll shoot you—which would be a pity for a man, heir to fifteen thousand a year; and secondly, that I’m rather afraid, with all submission, that he’s in the right.—Edward Aubrey is sworn companion and brother in arms to one Lord Algernon Mordaunt, and he frequents a certain club, well-known in the annals of this

bad town as the C. C. Club, and, moreover, I happen to know, that one night he won enormously, at a little game called hazard—and I conclude that he lost it all again, for he was pretty well cleaned out before he came to Ascot.”

“You don’t say so, Phillips!”

“But I do—and know it for a fact. Well, well, ‘forbear to judge, for we are sinners all,’ as the man says in the play.”

And all this time her cheek was growing paler and paler, but her back was turned to the party who were thus conversing, and she sat where she was screened from general observation. No one looked at her, no one heeded her, as she drank in sentence after sentence of this cruel discourse.

And then she recollected something that had been passing between Edward and another young man, as they stood by her mother’s carriage.—Something about money that Edward wanted—and had lost.

And her head began to swim and get confused.

The little conversation party behind her broke up, for there was a summons to dinner,

and as it happened that the very man, who was introduced to Lady Emma to lead her into the dining-room, was the one who had last spoken.

Involuntarily she drew back, with a repugnance which she endeavoured to hide, and which he did not seem to perceive, for he held out his arm, which it was impossible to refuse, so she found herself seated between him and the very youngster who had been such a champion of Captain Aubrey's.

How she longed to renew the subject!—to speak to him of Edward—again to hear him defended so warmly. She little cared who was right. She believed nothing—she was determined she would believe nothing ill of Edward.

Alas! her resolution obstinately to deny the truth to her own heart, was all that was left her.

It was not till the dessert that the subject was renewed, by Mr Charlton saying to Mr Piercefield,

“I wish, Piercy, you would not lend a helping hand in spreading these stories that have got about concerning that friend of mine.”

“Well, I won’t then. I am sure I don’t want to be the ill bird to any one—least of all to a friend of yours. But if you *are* his friend, tell him to beware of what he is about—that Lord Al . . .”—a look most expressive was launched at the speaker above the head of Lady Emma, who, stooping down towards her plate to hide her change of countenance, when this subject was renewed, appeared to be engaged with her strawberries.

Mr Piercefield looked horror-struck at the scrape, and took refuge in a dead silence, which lasted till the ladies left the room.

“I shall see him to-morrow—twelve hours—thirteen hours—not more, and then I will have it all out with him. He will tell me—for he is truth and candour itself, all that has passed. Shameful, scandalous falsehoods! I will be bound. He, a gambler!—he!—but what did they say of Algernon? Alas! dear, dear Algernon! Must you be calumniated, too? Dangerous society for Edward Aubrey, whom he loves so dearly! No, I will never, never believe it—but I shall see him

to-morrow, and then I will ask him all, and he will tell me all; for are not truth and sincerity themselves written in those eyes—those sweet, those brave eyes—so sweet, and yet so brave—so all that woman loves and ought to love. Oh! that to-morrow were but come!”

And, consoled by her own faith in the man she loved—in all the security of a warm, trusting heart, the young girl laid her head upon her pillow, and slumbered as peacefully as a child.

She thought the carriage never would come round.

She thought her father and mother never would have finished their breakfast.

She had breakfasted in her own room, by her mother's desire, who had a vast deal to tell and to talk over with the Marquis, before they returned to town.

Her tale was a very agreeable one to the impoverished nobleman—the man living upon expedients and contrivances. An alliance with so wealthy a man as Mr Aubrey, and the large allowance he proposed to settle upon

his son, was like the prospect of abundant and refreshing fountains to the one perishing with thirst.

He listened with the greatest good humour to the Marchioness's history, and what was still more unusual, patiently endured all she had to say relating to business matters—he was a man that detested business. In short, such was his complacency, that he even went so far as to give his lady a cheque upon his banker for a pretty considerable sum, to be laid out, as he said, upon the daughter's trousseau,—the Marchioness having proved to him that her credit was too low at all the finery shops she was in the habit of frequenting, for her to obtain what was needed upon the plan he would have greatly preferred, namely, that of taking everything and paying for nothing.

“And this will be the last trouble you will have with the dear child,” said Lady Hurstmonceaux, caressingly. “She will have her share of my settlement at both our deaths, and every expense upon her account will be henceforth spared. And really, considering all things, it is a very fair match, though Emma is excessively handsome.”

"A pretty girl enough," said the Marquis, carelessly. "Yes—as you say, it's well to have her settled. But where's Algernon?—He was not upon the ground yesterday. What's become of him? I want his opinion about a new purchase I have made."

"A new purchase! Will my humble opinion be of any use?"

"Not in the least, Peggy. You know as much of a race-horse as I do of a farthingale."

"A race-horse!—my *dear* lord!"

"Well, well—be quiet—don't look so horrified. Nonsense—I did not know what I was saying. Did I say race-horse? I meant cart-horse—gig-horse—carriage-horse—anything but race-horse—I keep race-horses!"

"Indeed I hope not—I devoutly hope not," said the Marchioness, in secret rejoicing over the cheque she held closely in her hand. "My dear lord, I do devoutly hope that racing stable of yours is not going to be set up again."

"Peggy, my dear, go and look after your daughter's petticoats and laces And so you say this fine son-in-law of yours is coming

to lunch at two o'clock, and you want me to meet him."

"If you could—if you would. It would be greatly better—I would fain show the greatest cordiality."

"Right enough," replied her husband, thinking of his own hopes and plans for benefiting by the alliance. "Very true, my love. Will you give me a place in your carriage? I may as well go up with you and Mem, and then you will be sure of me."

"When *will* the carriage come round."

It came to the door at last, and the three were soon seated in it. And then the Marquis chucked his daughter under the chin, and said—

"Hold up your head, Mem, and let's have a look at you. Deuced handsome you are, you chit—one can't deny that. And so—and so you are going to throw yourself away upon a Mister Ed——"

"Upon an esquire and a captain, if you please, papa—and a hero to boot," said Emma, smiling and blushing saucily at once.

"Well, I believe he's not a bad fellow—

people speak well of him—he made a sort of potter in the newspapers at one time—and so, I suppose we may as well throw you away—though it's half a pity it is—for you *are* a beauty, and no mistake.”

The eyes of the young girl brightened.

Yes, she was proud and happy to be beautiful—proud of the distinction, happy in the distinction—proud of being something well worth the acceptance of him she loved—and then to hear her father speak of him in this manner!

“Dear—dear papa! how good you are!”—and she took his hand, and bent down, and kissed it.

“Good—am I good?” he said with some emotion, for the words so ill-deserved struck him for once to the heart—“Good!—not good for much, I am afraid, my little girl.”

“So good!—so very good,” she kept repeating.

“Thankful for small favours, my pretty one—but if it proves me good to be very glad to see you happy, and with a brave, honest seaman, though he is but a captain and an esquire as you say, saucebox—why it's

easier than I ever thought it before to be good—and so bless thee, my child—and let us say no more about it.”

And having had quite enough for one while of this little scene of affection, he pulled a newspaper out of his pocket and began to read. She, sitting, thrown back into a corner, the picture of bliss and content; whilst her mother, with a face of business, sat in the one opposite, calculating how far the cheque she had in her pocket-book would go in clearing her present embarrassments, so as to secure the greatest possible amount of credit in obtaining her daughter's trousseau; which, with her usual love of show and magnificence, she resolved should be as handsome as it was possible to contrive.

And now they enter London—and Lady Emma stealthily looks at her little watch, and it is already half-past one o'clock—Oh, fly ye horses!—She wants to be there before he arrives.

They stop before the door of the villa, or rather palace in the Regent's Park, and Lady Emma springs out, and hastens through the hall, and up to her own room. She wants to

look into her glass, and take off her bonnet, which she thinks a prodigiously unbecoming one, and to arrange her hair, and assure herself she is very handsome.

And she is very well pleased with the happy face which she meets in the glass, and is in such a pretty little fuss and hurry, yet so good-natured withal with her maid—though her maid is constitutionally as slow and cold as her mistress is quick and ardent—but Emma is naturally sweet-tempered—and then, she is so happy now, that nothing can come amiss.

And so the clock on the chimney tells two, and the little bell at the top of the stairs rings its signal that luncheon is ready; and down she comes with her sweet bright face, looking so charming as she opens the door!

And sees . . . !

The Marquis at the foot, and the Marchioness at the head of the table, and two empty chairs on opposite sides the one by her father, intended for herself.

My lord and my lady have seated themselves, because they do not choose to appear to be kept waiting, but they have not yet

begun luncheon. They are every moment expecting Captain Aubrey to appear.

The Marquis lays his hand upon the chair by his side, and says—

“Come here, child.”

And she sits down there—and tries not to feel so chilled,—and endeavours to think of differences of clocks, and of unavoidable interruptions,—and so they sit in silence till the clock rings half-past two.

And the Marquis, without saying a word, plunges his knife into the cold quarter of lamb before him, and then turns and asks Emma what she will have.

“Nothing, thank you.”

CHAPTER VIII.

I fear too early : for my mind misgives,
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date

ROMEO AND JULIET.

“NOTHING, thank you.”

The Marchioness upon this raised her eyes, which had been bent thoughtfully upon the table-cloth—she was still ruminating upon the trousseau.

“Nothing! Nonsense, Emma, dear, you must not go without your luncheon—we shall have you quite ill—Give her a morsel of lamb, my lord, if you please”—and, pouring out a glass of wine—“drink that, child.”

For fear some judicious critic should here exclaim upon the gross ignorance or negligence of the writer, in supposing that people of such rank and consequence in the world as the family now upon the tapis, ever lunch

without having servants waiting upon them—be it known, that the Marchioness had, upon this occasion, ordered them out of the room, desiring that the short period of time which the Marquis would probably allow to his intended son-in-law, should not pass under the restraint of witnesses, as covered with eyes and ears as the goddess of Fame herself, according to Virgil or to Pope, I forget which, could be.

“Drink that, Emma, and let the clock alone, dear—Something must have happened, no doubt—I heard Mr Aubrey was very far from well—and Edward is a most affectionate son—and, besides, my love,” this was intended for my lord’s ear, “his father has been so excessively generous to him, and he comes into such a large property whenever the sad event of his father’s death should take place—that he cannot be too attentive to him during his life-time—depend upon it, my love, that is the reason he does not come. So take a morsel of lamb, and swallow that glass of wine like a good girl.”

The Marquis was a good deal absorbed in his luncheon by this time, and he began to

look about him, wanting mint-sauce and the castors, and, somewhat fretfully, he said—

“I can’t imagine, Peggy, the reason for the whim of sending all the servants away.”

And he rose up and rang the bell.

And the servants came, and the luncheon went on as upon ordinary occasions; and there she sat, with beating heart, listening to every sound of distant carriage approaching the gate to the park road, and glancing hastily to the window as any carriage seemed to approach—in vain.

It struck three.

And then the Marchioness rose from table, looking a good deal annoyed, but she concealed her annoyance as well as she could, that she might not still further depress and worry her daughter, who looked both pale and ill.

The Marchioness was not a very tender hearted person, but she was a good housewife of a mother, she looked to what *she* thought her children’s best interests; and, as far as regarded a grown-up daughter, one of her best interests was, of course, the preservation of her rare beauty, so that anything that in

the least threatened to affect her good looks was a matter of serious attention.

Nothing affects good looks like fretting. Even a couple of hours fretting is a bad thing—so the Lady exerted herself to hide her own annoyance, and to keep up her daughter's spirits, and when they left the dining-room she put her arm affectionately through Emma's, and said—

“My dear child, depend upon it, it is as I told you—we shall have a note from him this afternoon—in case he does not, as I am sure he will, appear in person to make his own excuses.”

There was the postman's knock.

The two ladies stopped at the head of the stairs, and looked down over the railing of the corridor into the hall, and to the house-door.

A footman opened it, and returned with sundry letters in his hand.

“Bring them up, directly, if there are any for me,” said the Marchioness, impatiently.

Whilst Emma stood with her heart beating, and her limbs trembling with anxiety.

Three or four letters were put into the mother's hand.

She opened them one after the other.

Messrs Green and Close are under the necessity—Messrs Roberts and Cross regret that necessity—Messrs Phillips and Wood beg to apologise for the urgent necessity . . . &c. —There were letters of no other description in the packet handed to her.

She shuffled the letters impatiently into her pocket, and turned into the drawing-room, and poor Lady Emma slipped away, and went into her own room and cried.

Cried, pretty thing, with all her young, girlish heart, as if she had not a feature in the world to spoil.

And hour after hour passed away, and again and again the knock or the bell at the door was heard—but neither servant nor postman brought a line to her mother or to herself to account for this strange absence. At six o'clock, poor child, she stole down into the drawing-room again, for she was sick with irritation and impatience.

The room was quite empty, and she went and stood at the window, and looked out

upon the green wooded park and upon the water which spread before her; but it was a gloomy prospect enough, for it happened to be a cold bleak June evening—the sky covered with sad-coloured clouds—the wind blowing gusty and cheerless—and the rain falling heavily from time to time.

Everything looked as miserable and dreary as she felt herself.

And still he did not come.

Then the dinner hour drew on, and it was time to go and dress.

Could he have mistaken?—Could her mother in her hurry have said, “dinner,” when she intended to say “luncheon?”—Her mother was scarcely ever known to make a blunder of this kind, but she had been in such an unusual flutter and hurry that morning when she wrote.

How foolish to make herself so unhappy!—He would come to dinner, that *must* be it.—Else he would certainly, long before this, have sent his apologies.

And, cheered with the thought, she went up stairs with a light heart and lighter step, and spent, I know not how long, before ringing

for her maid, endeavouring with cold water to drive the colour from her red eyelids. It would be so provoking if he found out that she had been crying.—She would not for the world.

And then she rang for Elliot, and ordered out her most becoming dress, and sat patiently to have her beautiful hair plaited into a world of fair plaits, and put up with the greatest taste, and arranged herself, and looked in the glass, and was so happy in her beauty !

She had worked herself up by this time to the most perfect security, and lightly she tripped down stairs, and opened the drawing-room door, and her mother, who was sitting there, raised her eyes, and was enchanted with her appearance, and began to think she was too good for Captain Aubrey. Then Emma went into the other drawing-room, and placed herself so that she could see all those who entered as they went up to her mother, without being seen herself unless sought for.

And one or two young men came in, invited to dinner by Lord Algernon some days before; and every time the door opened poor Lady Emma's heart beat, and she felt sick and faint, it faltered and fluttered so—and each

young man came up and paid their respects to her mother—but all—all—indifferent to her. Then one or two elderly gentlemen, friends of the Marquis, somewhat tardily joined the party; at last appeared the master of the house himself, and rang for dinner to be brought up. Looking so exactly as usual, and so entirely as if everything was going on as it ought to do, that poor Emma felt herself ready to die with grief and impatience.

So dinner was announced, and one of the old gentlemen took down the Marchioness, and another took down her daughter, and the rest followed, and dinner began.

“Can any of you young gentlemen give me news of that graceless son of mine?” said the Marquis, as he helped himself to cucumber with his fish. “It is three days since I have seen him, and though he of course does what he pleases with his time, yet as this house is head-quarters, he seldom is so long without letting us know something of his whereabouts.”

“We expected to meet Lord Algernon to-day,” replied one of the young men, “or that we should have heard from him.—I concluded

of course that it was a mere idle rumour, that he was gone abroad."

"Gone abroad!" exclaimed the Marchioness—"Where could you hear that, Mr Wetterly?"

"Some one, I forget who, was saying at the club, that he had seen him standing upon the deck of the steamer for Antwerp."

The Marchioness looked excessively annoyed, but said nothing more.

She always dreaded the Ascot week.—She had learned by long and painful experience, how fatal it had too often proved to the Marquis, and she still more feared it for her son. He was a far more desperate gambler than ever his father had been.

Emma listened, hoping to hear something of Captain Aubrey, but no enquiries were made by her father or mother, and of course, her lips were sealed.

And so that day past away in this terrible silence, and the next day was just like it.

Hour followed hour spent in impatient expectation. The striking of every clock being like a blow to the disappointed heart, which

rose again in a minute or two still to hope, and still to hope in vain.

The morning of the third day, the Marchioness had gone out early to shop, and about ten minutes after her departure, Mrs Elliot come up to her mistress's room, and said with a somewhat mysterious air, that there was a woman below with some very fine and remarkably cheap French lace, which she was begging to show to Lady Emma.

"I am sure I do not want any lace, Elliot," said Lady Emma, rather sadly. "What can the foolish woman come to me for?"

"Nay, my lady—but indeed you *do* want some lace—and this Madame—Madame—thing-am-bob, comes just in the nick of time, for there's my lady told me to see about getting some for your new silk dress—and you know, one gets them so cheap from these French people as come in this by-sort of way—The Marchioness always likes to deal with them."

"I dare say they're all smugglers or something worse, Elliot, or they could not be so cheap—and besides I've no money."

"Oh! never mind about the money—I can

manage about the money—and my lady won't be pleased, I'm certain sure, if you let go this bargain—for you *must* have some lace."

"Do as you like," said Emma wearily—She was too much out of spirits to contend with her waiting-maid about a trifle.

Mrs Elliot had been promised a very pretty bit of lace if she succeeded in getting the finery merchant an introduction. She returned to the hall, and begged her to walk up.

"Now, my pretty miss," said the woman, speaking with a sort of foreign accent, that any one the least accustomed to such things would have pronounced to be assumed,—
"You've got me what I wanted—the opportunity to show my lace, and now don't stare with those pretty dark eyes of yours—but I have another favour to request, and do you see this card of pretty edging is for the good natured personage that grants it."

"Well, what mighty thing is it?"

"Only you contrive to step down stairs for a few minutes, and leave that young lady and me alone."

Elliot did open her eyes at this, and pretty widely too.

"Lah! what's that for, I wonder—You think you can't cheat her, I suppose, if I'm by."

"Just as you please," said the woman, replacing the card of edging in her box again.

"Oh, well—sure there can be no harm in it," eyeing the edging askance.

"I should think *not*—but just as you like."

"Well, well—give me the card, I'll contrive somehow."

And the card of lace was huddled into her pocket.

Elliot marshalled the way to Lady Emma's room, and was followed by the lace-woman.

Lady Emma was sitting listlessly upon a couch, her head resting upon her hand which was thrust into a profusion of fair hair, at this present moment in great disorder. Her eyelids were red, as if with much weeping, and

her face wore that blubbered look in grief, which belongs to fresh and early childhood or youth, still fresh and childlike.

The lace-woman entered the room and made her curtsy, eyeing the young lady as she did so, with some attention. She was a woman of about the middle size, with a slender figure, almost approaching to elegance, and her face was beautiful from the regularity of the features, and the deep and dark lustre of two very fine eyes—but the complexion was withered with time and care, and there was a haggard look, seemingly the result of long-continued suffering.

She came up to the sofa upon which the young girl was sitting in melancholy mood, and very respectfully begged leave to show her some fine old point lace, which she had just received from the continent.

Emma looked up carelessly, without the least appearance of that interest and impatience common to girls of her age and rearing, upon such an announcement. She had entered upon real life, and her feelings, truthful and natural, were filled by honest grief and affection, and far above taking in-

terest in those trifles of which the very existence of many girls is made up.

So she looked vacantly at the box which the woman had by this time placed upon a neighbouring table, and was beginning to open and unpack, in order to display the contents, casting, as she did so, very significant glances at Mrs Elliott, and at the door; but that young lady was far more curious in fine laces than her mistress; her card of edging was safe in her pocket, and she resolved to see the contents of the box "with her own eyes," as she phrased it, before fulfilling her part of the bargain.

The box was soon opened, and a piece of beautiful old point was spread out and displayed before the languid eyes of the Lady Emma.

"It is very pretty," she said, in reply to the observations made upon it by the seller—"very pretty, but I have no occasion." . . .

"Bless me! my lady," broke in the favoured Abigail,—*"no occasion for it!—It's the most beautiful piece of old point I ever saw, and beats my Lady Morchamp's out and out—and as for occasion—why is there not*

the trousseau to be set about—my lady told me no time was to be lost, and this would just be enough,” measuring it with her fingers, “to make a berthe and sleeve-trimmings complete—just do for *the* dress—It’s beautiful, my lady,—quite superb.”

Lady Emma first coloured, and then turned pale, as she laid the delicate texture across her fingers ; then she put it gently away, with an action that seemed to say—“ I have no use for it ”—but she uttered nothing.

“ *If*,” began the woman—and she glanced in an almost imperious way at Elliott, who really at length seemed to feel constrained to leave the room, and was preparing to do so—“ if,” she continued, as the door closed after Elliott, “ it be as your servant hints, I would really recommend it to the Lady Emma, to take this lace—she will not easily find a piece more beautiful or cheaper.”

“ I don’t want so expensive a thing,” answered Emma, turning away, not to avoid temptation, but from mere weariness.

“ But the piece is comparatively so cheap, and just adapted for a wedding-dress,” the woman went on with a strange sort of

familiarity. "It would be impossible to find anything more suitable,"—and, turning to her box—"I have a veil, too—a perfect beauty that would just go with it—my lady shall have the whole for a mere trifle."

Emma sighed, but made no answer.

And her sigh was echoed by the stranger.

"Poor young lady," she said, turning to her, and standing before her with her eyes fixed to the ground, and as if half speaking to herself, "Poor young lady!"

Emma was startled at this strange proceeding, and lifting up her head somewhat haughtily, she looked at the speaker with a cold offended air, intended to remind her of what she was about—the look was, however, lost upon the object of it; the woman remained standing before her with her eyes fixed upon the carpet, and went on speaking to herself, without once looking into the young girl's face.

It seemed as if she had resolved upon saying what was upon her mind, and was half afraid of looking up, for fear of seeing something in that young countenance which might prevent her going on.

"Poor young lady! She thinks, perhaps,

that she will never want a wedding veil. She is mistaken there—such beauty never goes unwedded to the grave. But if she believes that the marriage she is now thinking of will go on, she is mistaken—It will never, never, take place.”

There was an involuntary start, a faint shriek ; then the cold dignity was resumed with intention to check at once what she considered as such great impertinence—but she did not choose to speak, and the haughty, offended air she had assumed was still lost upon the stranger.—

“She thinks, perhaps, that her secret, the cause of so many tears, is known only to her father and mother ; she is mistaken—Persons of her rank have no secrets—Every one—even I, a poor travelling merchant, know—that her hand was intended for Captain Aubrey—*was* I say—for it is so no longer, because he has ceased to be worthy of it.”

“Silence ! what do you mean ! How dare you—” and her foot beat angrily upon the floor—“how excessively impertinent ! Elliott,” turning round—“Shew this woman the door. Elliott ! Where is Elliott ?”

“Just stepped out of hearing, Lady Emma,”

said the woman, now raising her eyes, and fixing them upon the young creature's face. "You would have done right to be angry, if what I have just said had been for any ear but your own. I am no enemy of Captain Aubrey's—I wish him no harm—but this I say—he is unworthy of you."

"Upon that subject no stranger shall presume to speak to me. I desire you to leave the room immediately."

"Is it possible? Do you already know all, then?" eagerly advancing a few steps towards her.

Emma felt herself beginning to tremble from head to foot, and she could no longer repress her anxiety to hear more.—"Know already! What do you mean?"

"You have been expecting him these three days—He has not come—He never will come again."

"Never come again!—Ah, Heaven!" starting up with a sudden, sharp cry, "You do not mean that he is dead."

"Not that I know of," answered the woman coldly, "but worse than dead—disgraced."

"That I will never believe," turning proudly from her.

“Never! Poor thing!—How long will that never last—two minutes?—three minutes?”

Emma walked indignantly away.

“Nay, nay—We may turn our backs upon truth—but truth remains truth nevertheless. Yes, I may put this lace into my box again, I know,” stooping down as she spoke, and picking it up from where it had dropped upon the floor, as Lady Emma started up so suddenly.—“Young lady, I would fain leave you in the enjoyment of your happy delusion, yet it would be but a fool’s paradise! You were not made for such. . . . You are a high-spirited and noble creature, and can look sorrow in the face—I know you can.”

She paused as if to give more effect to what followed.

“Edward Aubrey has left the country—a convicted gambler and a banished man—Banished by his own sentence passed upon himself, but one which the tribunals of his country would confirm, if unhappily he were brought before them—But that he never will be—such horrible doom he will escape; for though he forged the cheque, it was upon his own father—and this I must say, upon the

kindest, most indulgent, and most generous father, that ever was betrayed by son. It was the part of a monster to rob him—and he has just broken his father's heart."

Emma turned round vehemently—She came forward wildly. She seized the woman by the two hands, and almost choking with passion she cried,

"Dare to say that again!—dare to say that again!—What business have you here?—What right have *you* to talk to me in this way?—Take your goods and be gone—do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear—and do you hear?"

"What impertinence!—how dare you?"

"Lady, we dare a good deal, when we have nothing on our own side to fear—or one thing only to fear, and there is one thing only I do fear—that you will be deceived. Perhaps he may come again before this business is generally known, and may persuade you to one knows not what—or, he may disappear and you never learn what is become of him, and the utter worthlessness of that which you pine after—I choose to let you know the truth—you may believe me or not, as you please, but *I* choose that you should know it, and

if you doubt my word, write to his father, and ask him to contradict me if he can."

And then in a low, almost hissing, voice, her head bent forward so as nearly to touch Lady Emma's ear, and fixing her eyes eagerly upon her, she said,—

"Edward Aubrey, whilst making love to the most beautiful and warm-hearted creature in this town—was unable to resist the old evil habits he acquired from the company it has pleased him to frequent since his return to England. I once told you something of this before—He has been frequenting the most notorious gambling house in this bad town; he has been betting with a low set at Ascot; and he has left the girl he loved—gone straight from her to plunge into this abyss of wretchedness and folly. He won at first, and robbed and ruined poor innocent lads, when he ought to have been ashamed of setting them such an example. But men can't go on winning for ever; and three nights ago he lost—he lost a very large sum, and he dared not—no, the brave Captain Aubrey dared not,—go straight to his over indulgent father, confess his fault, and seek forgiveness and assistance. No, he thought it

easier to make use of his father's name, forge a cheque, and fly his country."

"False!—false!—false! Have done with these wicked lies." And she walked up and down the room, almost wild with passion, and yet terribly frightened at what she heard.

"Hold your tongue and leave the room, I say—how dare you provoke me by such infamous lies?"

"His father, at least, knows they are not infamous lies"—the woman said coldly;—"His old, dying father—the stern, but doating man—he does not think them infamous lies. For what do you think he has done?—Would you like to hear what he has done, believing himself to be at the point of death? He has altered his will—cut off this fine Edward with a shilling, and left the whole of his property to the innocent, long-neglected brother. There now—You won't believe in his guilt—believe that, then—and ask yourself how your father and mother will like a disgraced, disinherited criminal for their son-in-law."—

Strange and improper as this conversation was, the poor girl seemed fascinated—She felt it impossible to resist the temptation to

hear more. She said nothing at first—then she repeated the word—

“Disinherited!—But his brother will never take—William Aubrey will never take it.”

“Never—That is, provided he can help it.”

“Help it!” she repeated sadly, but as if she did not quite understand.

“There are ways and means of compelling a man to accept such things. Mr Aubrey is pretty determined when he has once made up his mind ; whatever man he decides upon to be his heir—most surely he will take good care *shall* be his heir—so you need not insinuate anything against William Aubrey.”

“I was not saying anything against William Aubrey.”

“No, you had better not—at least not before me.”

“And why not before you?”

“Because I know him—and I love him. Oh, I’d be glad to have died to see William Aubrey righted!—and, praise be to Heaven! I *shall* see him righted at last—I shall! I’ve lived to see justice done, and now I am ready to die! William Aubrey!—Why Edward is

not fit to hold the candle to him—yet Edward has been loved and William hated, —but that's all over now. Mr Aubrey is an inflexible man. William may do all he can, and all he can he will do, you may be sure of that ; but everything he can urge on Edward's behalf only does mischief."

"You seem to know a great deal about the Aubreys," said Emma, sitting down trembling, and looking deadly pale—but forgetting everything in the interest of the subject.

"I *do* know a vast deal of them," answered the woman. "I know them, perhaps, better than most. I have known the boys since they were babies—one I loved dearly—and he deserved to be loved—the other I never thought so much of, as the rest of the world did—and my heart, like many another heart in that family, has bled under the sense of Mr Aubrey's injustice—And now it is strange—just before he is going to die, things show themselves in their true colours, and justice will be done. But oh, my young lady, this is a hard trial for you !—then think what it must have been to the father's heart !"

The poor girl could say nothing ; between sorrow and anger she was choking.

Alice—for she, as every one is well aware, it was—looked at her for a few moments with compassion and interest ; then she turned away, and began to pack up the laces and things which were scattered upon the table.

“I may take them away, now,” she said. “I have told what I thought you ought to know ; in all probability you would have heard the truth from no one else. Mr Aubrey will break off the match—that intelligence will reach you in a few hours ; but he will find some pretence by which to cover the real truth of the story. I think it but justice to the man who loves you more than life itself, that you should have the means of comparing the worth of the two. I have done my duty, as I think, and beg your pardon for the pain.”

She looked at Emma’s pale, scared, death-like countenance once more—then heaving a sigh, she took up her little packet of goods, and without another word went away.

CHAPTER IX.

Oh! breaking heart that will not break ;
Oh! pale, pale face so sweet and meek.

TENNYSON.

No sooner had the door closed upon Alice Craven, than Emma, scarcely able to breathe, and trembling with nervous agitation, endeavoured to rise from the sofa and totter into her bed-room.

With difficulty she got across the floor, shut herself in, and then, falling upon her knees by the side of her bed, covered her face with the counterpane, panting and breathing heavily, like some poor animal terrified out of its senses.

She could not shed a tear—she was as one petrified. Nor did she call upon God for help out of these depths of misery—Poor child, God had never been brought near to *her*. She

had no experience of the Father in Heaven, to whose protection the wretched one may fly, and find help, and counsel, and support—practically she knew nothing of this. Her poor little bark was driving wildly before the storm, and for her there was no Heavenly voice to say, “Peace, be still.”

Her sense of utter, utter loneliness and desolation in this, her first experience of sorrow, was terrible. She leaned, kneeling there against the bed, a poor hapless creature, stupified and darkened by her misery, vainly looking round for one ray of light.

She could not doubt the truth of what she had heard—there was something about the woman which persuaded her that what she said was true—alas ! Edward’s mysterious absence was now but too well accounted for!—Regret—love—indignation—sorrow—were struggling for mastery in her breast—the bewildering effect of sorrow, very much increased by her confused and imperfect perception of what Edward had really done. All she could understand was, that he had been guilty of some great crime—that his father had discarded him, and that they were parted for ever.

She was still there kneeling, poor young thing, smothering her face against the bed clothes, now and then hastily wiping her tears, which happily at last began to flow, when a knock was heard at the door. She knew her mother's voice, and hastily springing up, dashed away the drops that had fallen upon her cheek; and going to the door opened it. Her mother stood there, looking very serious and grave.

"May I come in, my dear?"

The only answer was to open the door a little wider, and the Marchioness entered and sat down.

"Emma, my love. —"

No answer.

"Emma, my dear, how pale you look."

"Do I, mama?"

"You cannot surely have already heard what I come to tell you?"

"I don't know—I have heard a shocking story."

"Not so very, very shocking after all, my dear. Captain Aubrey has got into a scrape—no such very uncommon thing with young men of his age; but the worst is that

his father—who is severity itself, has taken this peccadillo—which I confess I can't see any very great harm in—in his own violent unreasonable manner—and so, in short, he has been pleased to disinherit his eldest son, for what, after all, seems to me a venial offence enough—Some little gambling transaction or other, I understand. . . . However, as it is impossible that we can allow you to continue your engagement under such circumstances, and, indeed, as Mr Aubrey's letter entirely releases you, . . . why, of course, the marriage is at an end—and we must look out for a proper partner for you elsewhere. Never mind, my dear Emma," taking her hand kindly, and kissing the poor cheek all blistered with tears, "No one can cast the shadow of blame upon you, or upon any of us."

"Is that all you know, mama?" said Emma, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, my dear, and quite enough, I think—And now, Emma—one word of advice—Don't let this matter worry you—Put it all out of your mind as quickly as you can. There is nothing to fret much about, and you cannot think how fretting impairs the beauty

—and your beauty, my dear girl, I am bound to acknowledge to you, is the only chance you are likely to have for obtaining an establishment suitable to your condition in life.”

At this Emma withdrew her hand from her mother, and turned her head away. She felt very sick and faint—but her heart was naturally candid and good, and, to her praise be it spoken, poor little thing, she could even at this supreme moment believe that her mother’s intentions were kind, though the words made her thrill all over with irritation and agony.

She did not attempt to answer her mother’s speech, but feeling unable to stand, sat down quietly and silently, but with an expression of bewildered sadness upon her face that was most touching.

And the mother’s heart was touched by it.

She laid her hand kindly upon the poor girl’s arm, and said,

“Poor dear—This goes hard with you—but don’t take it to heart, dear child—You will soon be able to get over it—Time—and no very long time either—will do wonders for you, you will find. It is the best and only remedy, my dear girl—assisted by as great a

variety of objects, and as much dissipation of thought as possible. And you are just now in the best position in the world—excellently situated as regards these things, my dear Emma.”

Such was the best consolation, and such the best remedy which the well-meaning mother—poor beggar in such things as she was—had to offer. She had nothing higher, wiser, or better to urge—nothing to say that might make sorrow medicine, tears a healing balm, suffering a great and precious benefit.

To waste the rich medicine by dissipation—not to use it—was the sum of her short-sighted wisdom.

“And then, my own Emma,” she continued, applying her consolations to what in her opinion was the heaviest part of the evil; “and then, my own Emma, you are fortunate in this—It is your first season—little of this affair has got abroad—we shall by and by go out of town—and next year you will come up quite refreshed and everything forgotten by everybody—and though it is true that a beauty like yourself is commonly expected to go off the first season, yet it does not always

happen, and you will be certain to have plenty of opportunities in the second."

To which discourse the daughter only answered at first by turning upon her mother a dull sorrowful eye, and murmuring "Don't, don't pray, mama;" but as Lady Hurstmonceaux concluded with the words, "plenty of opportunities in the second," she raised her head, and parting away the hair, which was tumbling all in disorder about her face, looked up and quietly, but resolutely, said—

"No, mama, pray don't speak in this way. I know I must never think of him more; but I shall not forget Edward Aubrey."

With this assurance the Marchioness was forced to be content. It was not exactly as she should have taken the matter herself, or wished Emma to take it—but she did not want sense, and was well aware that it is vain to expect people to feel things after one's own pattern. She satisfied herself for the present with her daughter's unresisting acquiescence, and felt assured from the experience of her own heart, and of almost every other heart with which she had ever been acquainted, that time and absence would do the rest, and that

with a little patience she should see this beautiful girl established to her as great, if not greater, satisfaction.

So she kissed her kindly, and said—

“Anything more that I can do for you, my pretty one?”

“Nothing, thank you, mama—only if you should hear anything more, pray do not keep it from me—and, perhaps, you will excuse my coming down to dinner to-day—for, indeed, my head aches so badly, that I hardly know what to do with myself.”

“Bind a handkerchief with some Eau de Cologne and water round it,” said the Marchioness, going to the dressing-table and herself preparing the little remedy—“and lie down and get a little sleep if you can, my love, I shall not ask you to come down to-day—but to-morrow, I hope you will make the effort—for there is nothing so good in these cases as getting about. There is nothing for it, believe me, sweet child, but forgetting it as fast as you can; and general society is the best thing for driving things out of one’s head. There, there—be a good dear—lie still; here

is a pillow—your sofa does not seem very comfortable—will you go to the bed?”

“No, thank you, dear, dear mama,” said Emma, her heart touched by this unusual tenderness—for though her mother was always kind and indulgent, yet this affectionate assiduity was not usual—“thank you very much—I shall be better when I have had a little time to think—Thank you for letting me stay up stairs to-day.”

And the Marchioness pressing a really tender kiss upon the brow of the poor girl, with whose behaviour she was upon the whole very much pleased, quitted the room, and returned to plunge into that sea of cares and troubles, which is the portion of the anxious mother of a large family with such a man as the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux at the head of it.

“Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted within them—and they found no city to dwell in.”

The unhappy girl laid her head upon the pillow, and tried to think—tried, according to her instinctive sense of what it became her to do—to quiet the throbbings of her temples, the hurrying pulses of her heart, to restrain her tears and her bursts of anguish.

But she found it difficult work.

CHAPTER X.

The ocean old,
Centuries old,
Strong as youth, and as uncontrolled,
Paces restless to and fro,
Up and down the sands of gold.

LONGFELLOW.

SOME time has elapsed.

The family of the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux have left town, for Ireland. Mr Aubrey is gone down to a small villa, which he possesses, upon the coast of Kent, which he was accustomed to visit from time to time, for the purpose of sea bathing and boating, of which diversions he was extremely fond—his son William had accompanied him.

The villa, built in the form of a Swiss cottage, and sheltered by trees, stood upon an elevated sort of terrace, fronting the sea. The cliffs before it had been broken into two levels, as may be seen at Bonchurch, in the Isle of Wight, but with this difference, that

the lowest shelf, instead of presenting a shelving surface covered with shrubs and trees, as at that lovely place, fell abruptly and in a direct perpendicular to the water, whose waves, except at the lowest spring tides, beat against the precipice, entirely covering the beach.

The level, or, as it may be called, small plain upon the summit of this lower tier of rocks, was of considerable breadth and extent,—and being defended from the north and easterly winds by the steep precipices of the higher and more ancient range, afforded shelter to various trees and shrubs, which flourished perfectly.

There were groves of oak and beech and chesnut round the Swiss cottage that lay nestling among them—and the arbutus and the rhododendron and a variety of American plants abounded as if in their native soil.

Upon the westerly side of this little plain, the cliff sloped gradually down to the shore of a small bright-sanded bay,—where was a beach to admit of sea-side rambles, and the usual conveniences for bathing, all which were wanting beneath the cliffs in front of the

house, which fell, as I have said, sheer down to the water, and echoed with the hoarse voices of the waves which broke and foamed against them. Altogether it was a delightful spot.

Mr Aubrey's principal estate, where stood the handsome family mansion, was situated in a distant county. It was a remarkably beautiful place, and excessively beloved by every member of the household. And this love of their own particular place, so peculiar to English families in the position of that of Mr Aubrey, was especially strong in this; and they all loved this little villa by the sea with particular affection. It was something like what the youngest darling in a family inspires by the side of the eldest son and heir.

Father and sons all equally delighted in this ocean cottage, and, if possible, it was more beloved by Edward than by any of the three.

It was here that he had first learned to contend with that mighty element, so dear that it seemed native to him. From a child he had loved to battle with the waves, plunging

in and playing about like a sea-bird, at other times guiding his little boat over the perilous waters, in weather when a boat could scarcely live.

Accustomed to the place from an infant, it was thus probably that he imbibed his passion for the navy, a passion which had been strong enough to overcome his father's reluctance to part with him.

In short, Edward loved the little spot beyond expression.

It was, in truth, charming. The pretty Swiss cottage, half hidden among the sheltering trees; the upper range of cliffs, rising white, above and around it—the blue boundless heavens bending in a loving arch over head—the sea, with its multitudinous waves sparkling in the mid-day sun, and the green turf, covered with short, sweet grass, beneath your feet!

A lovely scene! and so the young man thought it, and felt it more than ever to be, as he now ascended, on foot, the western slope, and stopping, when he had gained the summit, turned round, and with a face of much emotion, looked over the wide-spreading

ocean he loved so well, and saw before him the pleasant home upon which his very heart doted. He was greatly moved,—his heart half broken with the sense of persevering injustice—every sentiment of old affection outraged—yet these feelings, mingled with a yearning, passionate desire to be reconciled with his father, and restored to the home he loved so dearly.

That home, from which they told him he had been banished for ever—a thing which he found it impossible to believe.

His father was a severe man, but he was a strictly just one; and though his lips had been sealed, for a time, out of regard to the security of his unworthy friend—yet, now the explanation had been made, surely he would restore him to the old place in his affection!—

Edward Aubrey had left England, as we have seen, immediately upon receiving Lord Algernon's letter, and had hastened to Bruges, where he met his friend at the appointed place.

Words cannot describe his distress and horror at the confession that Algernon had to make, nor the irresistible force of that

impulse, which urged him, as it urges every honourable mind, to shake off the imputation of meanness, as the most degrading defilement; but he knew his father well—he felt assured that, to shield his own name from disgrace, perhaps to shelter his son, even though believing him unworthy, there were no means on earth that he would not employ—but that his rage and indignation, at conduct so doubly treacherous as that of Lord Algernon, would know no bounds, and that no consideration upon earth would prevent him pursuing and punishing it, by the public disgrace and judicial sentence it so well deserved.

But this would be horrible. It would be the utter and irremediable destruction of the man once his friend, and the beloved brother of his darling Emma—but what was to be done? With a generosity, which all must love, though they cannot, perhaps, altogether approve, he resolved upon submitting to wait in silence, until the first violence of his father's rage, as he hoped, would have subsided.

He then wrote to William a full explanation of the circumstances, beseeching him to do the best he could for his friend, and wait

till the proper opportunity should occur for making the full explanation to his father, entreating him to do this in such a manner that Lord Algernon might not be publicly disgraced, and might escape the dreadful consequences that otherwise would await him.

Nothing could be more nobly generous than the whole tone of the letter. It concluded by desiring William to inform him, as soon as the necessary explanation should have been made, and a reconciliation effected, upon which he would immediately return home.

It may seem strange, perhaps, to some that so much precaution should be thought necessary upon the part of Edward as regarded a man so calm and self-possessed as Mr Aubrey usually was,—but there were strange inconsistencies in the father's character,—of which his sons had once or twice in their lives found reason to be made aware.

Though accustomed to hold an iron sway over his passions, more than once in his life they had proved too strong for him, and then the outburst had been terrible,—and he

had, upon those occasions, given indications of a temper so violent and vindictive, yet of so much persevering rancour, that it had left a terrific impression upon Edward's mind as to what his father, once aroused, might be capable of. His passions upon such rare occasions had more resembled the cruel violence read of in tales of native East Indian tyranny and cruelty—than those of a man who had been bred in Christendom, even if nothing more had been done for him than the being bred in Christendom.

It was therefore that Edward had, though with extreme reluctance, yielded to Lord Algernon's earnest prayers, and had consented for a short time silently to lie under the load of his father's displeasure.

When, however, he learned that Mr Aubrey had fallen desperately ill, and that his illness was attributed to anguish of mind upon account of his son's conduct, and as his correspondent stated, further, that to the surprise of himself and all the rest of the world, who were, as I have said, ignorant of the real state of the case, and imagined Mr Aubrey's

extreme anger to be excited only by the gambling habits and consequent embarrassments of his son, . . . when Edward was informed his father had openly discarded him and broken off the match with Lady Emma,—then he thought it time to write as I have said above. And, after waiting some days in the greatest anxiety, having received no answer from his brother—he had resolved to return to England, without delay—examine himself how affairs stood, and make his explanations in person.

It may be wondered at that he had not at once determined upon this course, as soon as he was made acquainted with his true situation, but it must be remembered that he had implicit confidence in his brother's zeal and discretion, . . . and he knew, that, in spite of Mr Aubrey's partiality towards himself, William exercised great influence over his mind,—and it was likely that in this particular case his endeavours upon the side of mercy to Lord Algernon would have more effect than Edward's own.

William was a perfect master of reasoning

and eloquence, and always master of his passions, whilst Mr Aubrey was at times completely at the mercy of his. The father felt the distinction, and secretly acknowledged the superiority, though he would have perished rather than have openly avowed it—but certain it is, this conviction lay at the root of many of his contradictory feelings as regarded his second son—of his jealousy and of his indifference.

But all these things were altered now, so far at least as regarded the jealousy and indifference.

Once looked upon as his heir, every relation was changed, and Mr Aubrey, sick and wretched, aware that his course upon earth was about to close, began to look with pride and satisfaction upon the incontestable superiority of the man who was now to succeed him.

It may be thought, as I have said, a great weakness in Edward to have yielded to the supplications of a man like Lord Algernon, whom he did not and could not respect, and whom, to tell the truth, he liked less and less every day—but it must be remembered he was Emma's brother ; that Emma loved him

with all the warmth of her young, sisterly heart, and how could her lover endure the thought of wounding that heart in this horrible manner?

Besides, Lord Algernon, with his usual want of delicacy, pleaded, and with some truth, it must be confessed, that it was Edward himself, whose example, followed by such an extraordinary run of luck, had first tempted him to the hazard table,—and that it was Edward's unseasonable demand for his five thousand pounds, just at that particular juncture, which had driven him to such perplexity and distress. It was impossible altogether to deny this.

“If you had taken it when I offered it you at first, all would have been right, and I should have known what to depend upon.”

There was so much plausibility in this reasoning that it considerably influenced Edward's mind—the very temple of candour and justice—and so, as we have seen, he had yielded, though with extreme pain and reluctance.

To lie under the imputation of so base an action even for a few days only was terrible—

but after he had written to his brother, his mind became more easy, and he had waited as patiently as he could the expected summons to return—a prodigal, but not a criminal—and be reconciled to his father.

Day after day had he visited the post-office, each day to be bitterly disappointed; at length he could endure the suspense no longer, he had taken advantage of the departure of the next diligence for Ostende, and had crossed over to England.

Immediately upon his arrival he had hastened to his father's house in London, and had there learned that Mr Aubrey was very ill, and was gone down to his place at the seaside, accompanied by his second son.

The servant who opened the door looked strangely at Captain Aubrey, as if astonished at his return. Domestics always in some mysterious way or other become acquainted with the secrets of the families in which they live, and unpleasant rumours had crept into the servants' hall with respect to the quarrel, and the reasons for disinheriting the eldest son—a measure which Mr Aubrey had openly proclaimed.

"Is my father really so very ill?" asked Edward of the stammering footman.

"I thought you must have known it, sir."

"Not too ill to see his friends, I trust?"

The servant shook his head.

"Not too ill to see me!"

"I don't know—I can't say, sir—you will find Mr William with him—Mr William will tell you everything."

"When does the coach start?—Open the door"—for the servant stood with the door half ajar, almost as if he intended to prevent Captain Aubrey entering the house.

"Let me in, I say—What do you stand staring there for?" cried Edward, angrily excited by the strange manner of the man.

"Let me in, do you hear?"

"Yes, sir, I hear—I hear"—replied the servant, hesitating and looking excessively uncomfortable—"but . . . I don't know—"

"D— you, what do you stand gaping and stammering in that way for? Can't you open the door and let me into my father's house when I bid you?"

"Oh, sir!—don't you know . . . it's a dread-

ful business—but oh ! Captain Aubrey—sure they must have told you Master was in an awful way—quite unlike anything we had ever seen in him before—and they do say, sir, that he's cut you off with a shilling ; and, sure, he's ordered that you shall never cross his threshold again."

Edward Aubrey answered not a word. He turned away, and went straight to the White Horse Cellar, whence coaches were almost every hour departing towards the southern coast of Kent. He threw himself into the one which would carry him nearest home. The coach was, happily for him, empty, and he was left by himself, to reflect undisturbed upon the cruel piece of intelligence thus abruptly communicated.

Could it be possible that his father had treated him in this barbarous manner—not only deprived him of his fair inheritance, but openly disgraced him in the eyes of all the world ?

His feelings were excited to a degree of bitterness and revolt, of which he could scarcely have believed himself capable. This barbarous exposure, even before the meanest

dependent in his household—it was a severity odious as it was violent.

Nothing but the very harshest interpretation of his conduct could justify or account for it—and he was condemned and punished unheard—but where was William?—had William received his letter? If so, why was not the cruel sentence mitigated at least?

Was his father absolutely implacable? Having once taken his resolution, however unjust it might afterwards prove to be, was he too proud to acknowledge a mistake? Impossible! He could not understand it—the more he reflected, the less he could comprehend it. There was some mystery, something wanting explanation—but that explanation at least he would have.

At first, in a storm of indignation, he had felt tempted to throw up everything—offer no further justification, leave his father to indulge his anger, and return to the continent at once.

But better thoughts presented themselves, as his feelings began in some degree to subside. He recollected that this severe judge was his father, after all, and such a father!—

One from whom, during the whole course of his life, he had till then received nothing but the tenderest and most partial affection—an affection the more to be prized because proceeding from one naturally of so cold and stern a temper—and then he began with remorse to call to mind what, in return, he had done.

Under the very best interpretation that could be put upon his conduct, he had been guilty of neglecting his father's representations, disregarding his advice, and forgetting his anxieties. Twice had he done that, which he knew his father would have so condemned and deprecated—Twice he had been allured to desperate gambling.—That it had been done under the goadings of jealousy and despair; that the offences were solitary, and quite at variance with his usual way of proceeding—excuses with which he had so far tranquillised his mind, and satisfied his conscience, as to appear in his own eyes an acquitted man—now seemed no longer to offer a palliation, especially when he looked upon his conduct in the

light in which it must have appeared to his father.

He felt guilty, and he felt truly penitent, and his heart smote him as he recollected the state of his father's health, and remembered how much anxiety upon his account must have tended to aggravate the disorder.

A noble disposition is easily melted to repentance—a generous spirit is bowed to the earth by the sense of having done wrong.

Edward's only desire now was to humble himself before his father, entreat his pardon, and endeavour to compose his spirits by contrition and a heartfelt reconciliation. The recollection of the inheritance which he had lost scarcely crossed his thoughts, except to scorn the idea of remonstrance upon that subject—to this part of the sentence he resolved unresistingly to submit.

To this better way of thinking he had brought himself when the coach stopped, and descending from it, he began to mount the green precipitous slope which led from the beach to the heights above—and there he stood looking fondly and lovingly round

upon every dear and well remembered object, from which he had been severed so long, now lying softened by the shadows of evening before him.

And every place seemed to speak of the two he loved so well, his brother and his father.

Over that slope William and he had rolled as little children—upon that pebbly beach, now nearly covered by the waves, clear as glass, running in tiny breakers to the shore, old nurse had taken them to bathe. Stripping the little lads upon some glorious summer day, and turning them loose to play like two sea sprites with the crystal waters.

There, his father had helped him to launch the first boat he had called his own—there, William had sat reading among the rocks, whilst he had tormented him with childish tricks, trying to divert his attention from his book.—There, they had walked—there, his father had given him his first gun—there, he had stood to watch the sea fowl—those beautiful white creatures of the element, soaring and sailing, just as they at this moment did, against the sunset sky.

His heart began to swell, almost like the sobbing heart of a child—it yearned with ineffable longing towards the place, the father, and the brother. All bitterness, all revolt subdued to sorrow and repentance—he only longed to throw himself into his father's arms, and ask and obtain forgiveness.

In this mood he remained gazing around him for some little time, then turning his steps towards his home, he hurried forwards.

The picturesque cottage lay before him, nestling amongst the beautiful shrubs and trees—the evening wind softly waved their branches, and the last rays of the rapidly descending sun cast their long shadows upon the grass, and tinted their swaying tops.—

Rapidly he crossed the space covered with short grass which intervened between the pathway by which he had mounted and his father's gate. As there was no lodge, he laid his hand upon the latch, opened it, and under the arching branches of the carriage way, now in deep shadow, and deeper silence, approached the beloved house.

The door of the little hall was standing

open, but no one appeared within—no servant was there to usher in a guest, or deny the son entrance into his father's house—In the fulness of his emotion he had forgotten all that, as, with a heart overflowing with every right and tender feeling, he crossed the threshold and entered.

The shadows of the overhanging trees, and the advancing twilight, gave a somewhat gloomy and melancholy expression to the deserted and silent hall.

The whole house seemed wrapped in an almost awful silence—not a footstep, not a voice, not the jingling or movements of the remotest servant were to be heard—all was profoundly still.

Edward's heart felt the influence—it began to faint and falter. He looked round. The door of his father's sitting room, or study, as it was called, stood open. He turned to it, laid his hand upon the lock, listened, almost breathless with awe and impatience, and at last ventured to push open the door and enter—but no one was there.

His father's chair stood in its accustomed place—a quire of paper, with some unfinished

writing, was before it, and pens were carelessly scattered around. It seemed as if the master had just left his place. Upon a small table by the other side of the chair a book lay open. A great coat, as cast off by one just returned from walking, was negligently thrown over a couch in a more distant part of the room.

As it appeared as if his father had quitted the apartment but a very short time before, and would probably soon return, here Edward determined to await him. It was the place where he would best like to make his explanation, and go through the little scene which must in all probability follow.

The room was not large. It was surrounded with well-stored book-cases. Mr Aubrey's writing table, with its drawers and cupboards, stood in the centre; a few pictures were hanging above the bookshelves; and, at the end of the room, there was a large French window, which opened upon two or three steps leading to a little wilderness of choice plants, from which, over a verdant lawn, was commanded a view of the sea.

It presented a glorious view at that mo-

ment, for the waves ran high, swelling and rolling onwards, in all the majesty of a full spring tide.

The young man approached this window ; he found it closed, but did not open it, and he stood looking out, hoping, as was his father's usual custom, that he might return from his walk by a little winding path through the pretty wilderness, and let himself into his study by the French window, which fastened like a door, and of which he always carried the key.

And so Edward remained some time, gazing upon the well-known and dearly-loved scene, and his thoughts gradually composing themselves, till he no longer dreaded the coming interview, but began to regard such a scene, as he had been used to do in his boyhood, when the fond and affectionate submission and penitence he was ever ready to show when in the wrong, had won for him only a yet fuller measure of affection in return. That there would be a cordial reconciliation this time he felt certain, and there is something so sweet in a cordial reconciliation with those we love, that there have been some—ah ! unwise ones !—ready

almost to provoke a quarrel with their idol, for the mere pleasure of the making-up.

He had stood in this manner some time, now watching the path by which he expected his father to appear—now gazing upon that fine, flowing sea—now upon the white sea-birds that rose and fell in the bright blue air, before his attention was awakened to the peculiar stillness which appeared to pervade the house.

He now turned to listen; but it seemed like a palace of the dead—Not a footstep—not a sound—only the dull echo of the breakers as they fell against the rocks, and the tick of the clock upon the chimney, sounding in the silence like a bell.—

He listened, till an indistinct fear of something amiss began to take possession of him. So he turned from the window, and was going to leave the room and examine further, when the foot-steps as of one cautiously advancing along the passage were heard to approach. The door, which he had left ajar, was at length slowly opened, and a woman, treading as if anxious to avoid making the slightest noise, entered the room.

She held some papers in her hand, and came towards as if to lay them upon the writing table, when perceiving Edward, she uttered a faint shriek, and the papers fell from her hand.

“Mr Edward!—You!—you here!” she cried, in a startled voice.

“How is my father, and where can I find him?” said Edward, approaching her, and much alarmed at the woman’s manner.

“Oh! how could you get in—who could let you in?” was the only reply to the question. “Oh! how could you get in?”

“What can you mean,” cried Edward, impatiently. “Tell me, where is my father, and how is he?”

“Your father, sir—good gracious me!—and to think of your being here! What must I do—what will he say?”

“Say—say I am here! Tell me where he is. I must speak to him immediately. Tell me where he is—I must speak to him at once. This trifling is intolerable,” he cried, making hastily for the door; but the woman seized his arm.

“Are you mad?” she said.

“Mad!—to seek my father! What can you mean—speak—where is my father, I say?”

“Sir—sir—oh! Mr Edward—Mr Edward, how can you?—how dare you?—you mustn’t—you mustn’t, indeed—You must go away, Mr Edward—indeed you must go away—and for Heaven’s love speak low. I wouldn’t have my master hear your voice, no, not for all the universe! but oh! sir—sir—how could you? . . . and such a good father as he’s been to you?”

“I must and will see my father instantly,” Edward repeated—it was all he could say, he was becoming more and more agitated every moment—“Tell me where he is, woman; for see him I must and will.”

“He will soon be,” at last she answered mournfully, “where neither you nor I, nor any one shall ever disturb him more—where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest—Oh, Mr Edward, how could you!—such a kind, kind, father as he’s been all along?”

“Oh! don’t stand talking in that way,” cried Edward, smitten to the heart, and wringing his hands—“only let me see him—do

you think I am not heart-broken enough for having offended him, but only take me to him—or . . . why do I stand trifling here?—I will seek him myself.”

But again the old woman caught his arm—“that you mustn’t—shan’t do—The sight of you would kill him at once—It’s bad enough as it is, poor gentleman—but you wouldn’t give him his death-blow at once—Sure it is—but you’ve given it him—You wouldn’t—no you wouldn’t—kill him outright . . . Oh! Mr Edward!”

Edward stopped at this. He was by this time very pale, and trembling in every limb.

“Is my father then so *very* ill?”

“Ah, didn’t you know?—Sir, he cannot live many days.”

“And has he not forgiven me?—You seem to know all, Catherine—speak out—Has he forgiven me?”

“Oh, sir!”

“Speak out—make haste—tell me he has forgiven me—tell me he *has* forgiven me.”

“Oh, sir, Mr Aubrey, you know, . . . he’s a quiet, cold man, hard enough to move; but when he *is* moved! Oh, sir, it’s a very awful

thing. I was with him when his father died, and when his mother, that he loved so, died; and when his wife died, and all of 'em; but it was nothing like this oh, no! . . . You shouldn't—you shouldn't indeed, Mr Edward."

"But he *has* forgiven me—surely he has forgiven me! My brother has been here. Did you not say my brother had been here?

"Mr William!—Your brother, sir! No, he's not been here for a good many days."

"But he *has* been here," Edward went on with more calmness, "and he has seen my father—Then all's right—My father is alone, take me to him immediately."

"Sir—sir—he could not bear it—he couldn't indeed,—he could not bear even to know that you were in the house."

"Is he so very unrelenting?" said Edward, turning away thoughtfully—then recovering himself, and coming up to her again—"No, no, nurse, it is impossible—don't say so—go to him, tell him I am here—come humbly, humbly to ask his forgiveness, and—stay, stay—ask him whether he has seen my letter?"

"Oh! sir, don't bid me do any such thing,

I don't know anything about the letter, but it will kill him, sir, to hear your name! He can't bear it, indeed he can't; the doctor said that he must be kept *so* quiet -- that the least flurry would carry him off at once, and oh, Mr Edward! you know"

"And you say he will die, and he is to die cursing me," he cried in the bitter exaggeration of a wounded spirit, but little did he think how nearly he approached the truth.

"Ah, sir," the old woman now went on, "you should have thought of all this before."

"Horrible! horrible! What can you mean? You do not intend to say that he really has cursed me?"

The woman was silent—she turned away her head.

"And you think that I shall let him die—let him depart—everything unexplained, and with his curses upon my head!—Where is my brother? Where is William? Sure he could not! . . . I must and will see my father," he cried in the loud voice of desperation—for just then a shocking suspicion flashed into his mind—"Woman, let me go,—see him I will."

"Oh, sir, but let me run first—let me

prepare him, if it must be so." He suffered her to pass him, but followed her immediately along the gallery and up the stairs.

She hurried on until she reached a well-remembered door at the end,—the door of his father's room—She opened it hastily, though noiselessly, and entered. He paused upon the threshold and listened.

Feebly and hoarsely the voice within spoke.

This was all that was said—

"There has been a noise in the house—I cannot bear a noise,—keep them quiet, can't you?"

Faintly, but irritably, these few words were uttered.

Edward's heart began to tremble within him, and his knees to knock together.

"Sir, some one is come—"

"My son William!—I am glad—I thought he would never come."

"Not Mr William, sir."

"Ah—well," in a voice of deep melancholy,—"come who will, we all must die alone. Was it the doctor, then? Don't let him come up,—tell him to let me die in peace,—I have done with physic,—don't let him come up."

“No, sir,—it was not the doctor.”

“Who else, then?—who dare disturb me?” with a momentary flash of the anger of other days. “Who dare come and disturb the last moments of a most miserable man?”

“One, sir,—oh, master,—oh, Mr Aubrey,—he’s come to pray for pardon.”

There was a pause of deep silence.

“He *is* come at last, then,” was uttered in a tone of intense bitterness. “He condescends to come at last, does he?—but no, no, its too late. You may tell him its all over—its too late—My will is made, if that’s what he’s come about—its too late to change that,—and as to my pardon, if that was all he wanted,—tell him, he might have asked a little sooner for it.”

“He did,—he did,” cried Edward, bursting into the room in violent agitation, and rushing to the bed where lay the old man, a ghastly spectacle.

The withered, wrinkled, wasted countenance rendered hideous by the mingled expression of rage and despair. He was sitting up in his bed, supported by pillows; he turned upon his son and gnashed his teeth.

“ Out of my sight !—out of my sight ! You there, you ! Insulting my last moments !—Out of my sight,—out of my sight,—disgraced yourself,—disgraced me,—disgraced him,—disgraced all—I have cut you off with a shilling—and curse you with my last breath, as here I die.”

And casting a look of rage, excited to madness, upon his son—he fell back with a ghastly glare, and died.

It was too much—

The intellects of the father were evidently gone—and this last flaring up of earthly passion, ere all earthly passion expired for ever, was but the leaping up of a wild delirium.

But Edward was now himself trembling upon the verge of madness—The sudden reverse of feeling—the horrible spectacle—the vague suspicions of his brother—the father’s heavy curse—all rushing upon him at once ! It was too much. Overpowered with physical and moral suffering, long and hasty travel, and this dreadful conclusion of all, his intellects began to give way. The room seemed to swim around him—the

spectral aspect upon the bed to assume the most fantastic and horrible appearances—his eyes flashed with the fire of a sudden burst of insanity, as casting his arms above his head, he uttered a wild scream, and rushed out of the room.

Down the stairs—a new Orestes, pursued by the avenging demons—he fled across the little plain that separated the house from the cliffs, and flinging himself desperately down, the waves swept over him.

CHAPTER XI.

. . . . What a wreck

Had we around us! Scattered was the floor,
And, in like sort, chair, window-seat, and shelf. . . .

WORDSWORTH.

You would hardly have known her again—
That blythe, gay, blooming girl; so beautiful
and so winning, so sweet, yet so spirited, so
matured, yet so childlike—lovely girl and
lovely child in one.

Poor Emma!

Sorrow never came upon one more inexperienced in sorrow.

And now she had to suffer the heaviest grief of the human heart, with the exception of remorse for misconduct of its own.

The idol of her soul—whom she had clothed with all those excellencies of which the trusting heart is so lavish—the man she had loved so sincerely and entirely, had not

only proved himself unworthy of her affection, but had wronged it in the most sensible way.

It was impossible that he could have truly loved her and have acted by her as he had done; and yet, though she kept repeating this to herself, something within forbade her believing it altogether true. He could not have looked and spoken as he had done, and been so entirely false—it was impossible!

Sometimes she found consolation in doubting the truth of what she had heard, more especially of the strange woman's story. But then, alas! all so fatally conspired to corroborate the facts, that it was scarcely less than insanity to discredit them. In this wretched state of mind, it was, perhaps, a relief that her parents, overwhelmed with debts and difficulties, decided upon leaving London, and returning once more to their seat in a remote part of Ireland, thus endeavouring to escape, for the present at least, from creditors and temptations. Hurstmonceaux Castle was a beautiful but utterly neglected place, situated upon the shores of one of those large lakes which are frequent in the interior of Ireland. It stood almost

buried in immense woods of oak, fir, and ash, and shut in from the outer world as it were, by high hills, or rather mountains, which, covered with heath and ling, spread barren and frowning around it, at this season presenting nothing but the appearance of a brown and barren desert.

The valleys between these hills were mostly filled with bogs, where, in the dark, black, and unhealthy-looking soil, the melancholy cotton-grass waved its white head, and sweet gale and yellow flags were mixed with coarse bunches of harsh grass, and interspersed with tiny dwarfish willows.

Patches also of cultivated, but most miserably cultivated, ground, might be here and there seen, where the bog had been in some places redeemed, and where potatoes, with scanty crops of stunted oats struggling for existence, were growing.

Wretched huts were scattered about, inhabited by a population of squalid, half-clad men and women, with children in swarms, round the scarcely human abodes. The men were dressed in tattered great coats, the women in tattered linsey-woolsey petti-

coats, men and women with the short black pipe in their mouths—their only luxury—lounging idly about, without object, as without hope or care.

The whole scene telling but too truly the old tale of the spendthrift landlord and the thriftless tenant.—Misrule and idleness, indifference and stagnation everywhere.

Nothing could appear more disheartening and dreary than the aspect around, as the young creature, of late accustomed to better things, seated upon the back seat of the carriage, of which her father and mother occupied the front, looked out and gazed upon what was before her. The magnificence of nature thus harshly contrasted with the vices and the miseries of man! Her own sad and heavy heart adding its tones to the picture now presented, under the leaden colouring of a dull, Indian-ink sky.

She could scarcely believe it to be the same place which she had left some two years before—little aware of the power exercised by habit over the eye, or how far it may become accustomed to scenes, however disorderly and

wretched, provided we have not the means of comparing it with better.

A child born and reared among these mountains, Lady Emma had been alive to their magnificence and beauty, but she had not missed, for she had never before known, all that was wanting to render the scene one on which the mind could dwell either with comfort or satisfaction.

As they approached the park, she now for the first time remarked the ruinous, disfigured aspect of the two lofty pillars faced with stone, and once surmounted by the effigies of the family crest in the same material, but now despoiled of their ornaments; one of the frowning griffins having lost a wing, and the other lying headless and half-covered with grass and weeds upon the earth. The beautiful tracery of the once rich iron gates was defaced with rust, and though one leaf still hung upon its hinges, the other, broken and immovable, rested upon the ground, and was half grown over with nettles, burdock, and wild briars.

In the days of careless, blissful childhood, Emma had thought more of the pleasure of

gathering the abundant flowers of the straggling wild rose and honeysuckle, than of the ruinous neglect and disorder around her ; but now she saw things under a different aspect.

They shocked her most painfully.

The lodge, or rather hut, which stood upon one side of the entrance gate, had once been an elegant, Devonshire-thatched cottage, with ornamented gables, and all the pretty intricate lines belonging to that style of building ; but it was now only a defaced, wretched looking ruin.

The little porch was roofless, and almost buried under the huge branches of a great flaunting briar. The door seemed as if it could scarcely hold together, and was dropping on one side. The windows were half of them stuffed with straw or rags—the wooden ornaments upon the gables falling to pieces—and the thickly thatched roof, which once looked so warm and comfortable, now presented a wretched appearance—some portions blown off—in parts roughly patched with fern or rubbish, whilst long grass waved over the roof tree, and stonecrop and fungus grew upon the moist, decaying thatch.

Nevertheless, from the chimney rose a thin blue line of smoke, which showed the house was inhabited, and might be said, indeed, to be the only cheerful object the scene presented. The faint grey spiral crossed an outline of dark woods, which shut the landscape in upon every side, except one, where a view opened of the glorious lake—now, however, lying dull and colourless, reflecting the sombre hue of the sky.

There was little necessity for any one to unclosethe ruined gates; but a tattered woman, with the usual short black pipe in her mouth, came out of the hut to push back the rich tracery of the leaf still upon its hinges, whilst a set of brown, ragged, half savage looking children, with gleaming eyes, and heads a perfect mass of dark tangled hair, stood gaping and staring at his Lordship, as the carriage and four passed through the entrance, and turned into the green-weeded, neglected road, which led through the woods to the house.

How wild those woods!—How dark and lonely they looked! Here fallen trees, never carried away, were left decaying amid

the damp leaves of the briars that clambered over them—on one side, dark waving pines and glorious oaks—then trampled saplings and headless fir trees—I know not how to describe it, such an air of peculiar desolation, uncared for and unheeded, as pervaded everything.

At length a sudden turn of the road, through another ruinous gate, brought them in front of the grand lordly mansion, where her ancestors had lived, and where she, a happy, thoughtless child, amid a large brood of as thoughtless brothers and sisters, had been reared.

It was a noble elevation.

The house stood upon a rising lawn, which swept to the borders of the beautiful lake, with plantations and great trees on either side of it, descending in waving sweeps to the water's edge.

No neglect of man could altogether spoil that fine picture; and yet, the clumps of rank grass, scattered over what should have been a smooth, verdant lawn, the tall rampant thistles, and nettles growing not only among the plantation trees, but even against the

very windows of the house, struck the young girl's eye, as they never, never had done before.

That grand elevation seemed to her even more grand—that lake more expansive and beautiful—those noble trees more imposing than she had recollected them.—

She had seen nothing that could surpass these things since she had left Ireland; but then the miserable slovenliness and disorder; the air of poverty, neglect, and decay, which, discernible upon all sides, made villanous contrast with such magnificence.

She looked at her father and mother with a feeling of sorrowful sympathy—after all the splendours and elegancies of London—to return to these rude wilds!

Her poor mother!—

But her mother was searching for something or other in one of the pockets of the carriage, and she only cast a vacant, indifferent glance at the scene before her. Her father had his betting book in his hand, and was pondering attentively over its pages.

That fatal, fatal, betting book!

She had learned to know it now, and to shudder at the sight of it.

Once he lifted up his head and looked out of the window, but it was with the appearance of perfect absence of mind—he seemed not to see, or seeing, not to heed what he saw.

They stopped before the magnificent portico, with its noble fluted columns of Irish marble, rising in one unbroken line to the roof of the house, where they supported a fine pediment. Beneath it two large oaken doors, dull with age, and soiled with unremoved stains of dirt, were thrown open; and numerous servants, in rich, but dirty and ill-made liveries, appeared. The lacqueys crowded into the great hall, making a prodigious fuss and show of respect and observance, whilst my lord, in a dandy sort of Newmarket dress,—my lady, in a soiled pink bonnet and white cloak, once most rich and expensive, but now all the worse for wear,—and the beautiful Emma, looking very weary, and very very dreary, entered.

Her father and mother turned into a small sitting room, scantily furnished, in which, though

it was a July day, a fire of logs was burning, but Emma glided away. She passed into the lofty hall, where tattered banners waved mournfully, and many an ancient spear and shield, and rusted cuirass, covered, like everything around, with dust, were hanging; and then she mounted the great wide shallow oaken staircase, round which the grim portraits of her ancestors in blackened elaborately carved frames seemed dimly scowling, and entered a corridor that ran along the south side of the hall, and led at either end to wide and immensely long passages, studded with the doors of the innumerable bed rooms. She hurried with impatient steps down the one upon the left hand, opened the last door of all, and with a "Here I am," found herself among a crowd of fine, but rude, disorderly, children.

She was saluted with a wild shout of rapture, and was in the arms and in danger of being mobbed and devoured by her little brothers and sisters, who left her no time to look round, or scarcely to breathe.

Some sprung at her neck to embrace and kiss her—some laid hold of her arms to pull

her down to their level—some tore at her dress and cloak, as if about to rend the fabrics in pieces.

“Emma’s come home!—Emma’s come home!” was the cry—loud, obstreperous, wild, and violent—but the very sound of it made her heart once more beat free and warm.

The room was low overhead—great heavy beams crossed the ceiling—it belonged, in fact, to the old part of the house which had been added to at an immense expense in a more modern style. Tall narrow casement windows lighted one side, over which clustered heavily the fantastic branches of untrained trees—vines and roses, and virgin’s bower, and virginian creepers—till the very sunbeams fell green and dimmed into the room. The walls were covered with an old worn-out paper,—though covered it ought scarcely to be called—for, in the true spirit of the country, they were in many places bare, the paper having been torn off, and hanging in tatters. Broken chairs and couches, with ragged seats—tables supported upon rickety legs, gashed with penknives, and foul with ink—a floor

that seemed as if it had not been washed since it was laid.—

Such was the aspect of the scene around her.

An old cross-looking woman in spectacles was sitting in one corner of the room, upon a very ancient arm chair, employed at her needle.

She was the presiding divinity of this abode of uproar and misrule, dignified most unjustly by the name of school-room.

But the children all remembered Emma, and loved her well. They were wild, warm-hearted Irish children, with elastic nerves and superabundant spirits. English children might have felt somewhat shy and strange at this appearance of their elegant sister—but not they—they heeded nothing of the kind, they tore and pulled at her in a rapture of ungovernable joy.

Emma was girl enough, and Irish girl enough, to overlook the want of all care, and training, visible here, though she had been so sensible to it among the inanimate objects below.

She laughed, and suffered herself to be

hugged, and kissed, and pulled till she was almost dizzy; whilst the old woman lifted up her withered, spectacled face, and kept grumbling, “Be quiet all of you—Can’t you be quiet? or, we’ll see if I shan’t fetch the rod.—Do you hear, Master Patric, let Lady Emily’s gown alone—Arrah, but won’t you get it?—Miss Millicent, be quiet a-hugging your sister as if she were the blessed Virgin herself.—Miss Lucinda, what are you a-pulling her down to you for?—Let her be—won’t you?”—As two chubby arms, soft as the down of the dove, were thrown round the elder sister’s neck, and a little loving impassioned face, tears in the eyes, was dragging her down for a kiss.

Emma gave such a kiss—such a dear loving kiss! And then she caught the little creature in her arms, and went and sat down upon a low chair by the side of nurse, and said—

“Don’t be angry with them, nurse—dear things!—They are so glad to see me again.”

“And aren’t you glad to see us?—and aren’t you glad to come home to ould Ireland again?—And sure, aren’t we glad to see *you*?”—was the general cry.

And Emma again bent her head down, and kissed and hugged—and they clustered round her, and hung upon her like a swarm of bees.

“ You’ll smother your sister, an you don’t take care, you little tiresome vagabones—be quiet then, or I’ll be with you”—reiterated the nurse, yet smiling in spite of herself.

“ And so you be come home at last to the old place—and my lord and my lady too—and Mr McMooney says you’re a-going to stay. . . But where’s my jewel of all—my prince of peers, Lord Algernon—Arrah! but I hope he’s of the party.”

But at that name all the sudden brightness of joy, which had seemed for the moment to have chased her sadness from the poor girl’s heart, was clouded—her countenance changed, and she stammered—

“ No, nurse, he’s not come with us this time.”

“ Algy—Algy—ain’t Algy come?” exclaimed the elder boys, in a tone of disappointment.

“ No, my dears.”

“ But he’s coming—Sure but he’s coming—Emmy, sure he’s coming?”

“ By and by, I hope—Don’t, dear Ulick—don’t pull my hair so, that’s a good boy—Felicia, let my cloak alone, will you?—Nurse, don’t you think this room is very hot?”

“ Open the window, Miss Felicia, please,” said the old woman, who was almost too decrepid to get across the floor and do it herself.—“ And stand back, childer, won’t you? The poor thing’s almost suffocate.”

It was hard work, this sudden return to all that burden of pain and sorrow, which for a moment had been escaped; yet she felt a sense of comfort, nevertheless—these dear, warm, loving hearts! they warmed her’s.

She tried to forget the past, and to give herself up to the present.

“ Stand on one side,” she said, “ put yourselves in a row, my darlings, let me see who has grown the most since I went away.”

“ It is you that are grown the most,” said Felicia. “ What a beautiful young lady you are—and what a pretty bonnet and cloak you’ve got.”

“ Aye,” said the old woman crossly—“ and

how nice and tidy she looks! so unlike you—you harum-scarum things—why, I wonder you are not ashamed to be seen.”

Felicia's countenance fell, and so did Margaret's—they were the two elder of the girls. They glanced down at their dirty pinafores, and shabby and almost ragged frocks, and they looked, as they felt, ashamed—ashamed of their appearance for the first time in their lives. Poor things, how could they help it?

And this made Emma look upon them with her new eye, as we may say—that sad, truthful, disparaging, improved eye of hers—and she felt shocked and sorry. Doubly sorry as she gazed upon those honest, thoughtless, loving faces, now overcast and shadowed over with a sort of bewildering shame.

But a heavier sense of shame fell upon *her* as she saw what they were, and reflected upon what they might have been, and then glanced back upon the life she had so lately been leading—at all its luxury and ostentatious extravagance—upon the elegance of her own attire and habits, and contrasted it with that of these poor neglected children—children of the same father and mother too.

There was, it is true, a considerable difference of age between these young ones, and herself and her two other brothers—but what of that ?

And oh, then, how she shuddered, as she thought of that dreadful gaming table—that dreadful betting stand—and of all its victims and its consequences ! Her father—her brother—her lover ! All hope of better prospects at an end ! And her heart sickened, and she felt at that moment as if she could almost hate herself, and all but these poor little ones.

“Come hither, my Felicia,” she said to the drooping girl, who, with her head hanging down, stood bashfully before her—“Come hither and kiss me again—and you, little Margaret—and you, darling Lucinda.”

The boys had by this time retreated. Sentiment was soon exhausted with them—and they were already engaged at a riotous game of leap-frog, shouting, and laughing, and jumping at the other side of the room.

“Come hither, little girls”—and Lady Emma drew them lovingly and fondly towards her, gathering them under her wings, like a

young mother dove—"Don't, nurse—let them be. My dear loves, and so you are glad to have Emma home again?"

"But you're so fine," said Felicia, hanging down her head, and putting her finger, half sulkily, half sorrowfully, into her mouth.

"Do you think so?—Not very fine, *I* think—but never mind, you shall be as fine one day or other if you are a good girl. And in the meantime wash their faces and comb their hairs, and give them clean frocks—won't you, nurse? before mama sees them."

"Bless your heart, my Lady Marchioness won't care two pins' points how they look—She always says as how it never matters for children i' th' school-room what figures they go—And now she's plenty to do with her money she can't be a dressing them—They must wait till their time comes;—and, sure enough, Lady Emma, I hope their turn *is* coming, and it's time it should—for I hear as how you are going to be married."

"Are you?—Are you, Emma?"—cried the three children at once—"And you'll let us come and see you?—You'll let us come and see you?"

She stooped and kissed them all round.

“ Yes, dears, *when* I am married—but that’s not to be yet—you don’t wish to get rid of me, do you?”

“ Oh no—oh no—never, never, never,” lisped the little Lucinda, and the other two kissed and embraced her in silence.

CHAPTER XII.

. . . but Innocence is strong,
And an entire simplicity of mind
A thing most sacred in the eye of Heaven,
That opens for such sufferers' relief,
Within their souls, a fount of grace divine.

WORDSWORTH.

THE evening had closed, the family had separated and were gone to their different apartments, and Lady Emma had returned to her's.

The day had been one of so much hurry, fatigue, and confusion of thought, that it seemed to her as if she had not found a moment even for breathing-time, far less for reflection.

And yet how much need there was for reflection.—How much to be done, how much to be endured, how much to be weighed and considered.

She was very young—her feelings were ardent, her imagination excitable, her character

entirely unformed, and she had never been subjected to anything like proper moral discipline. With little or no religious instruction, the sense of duty undeveloped, the idea of responsibility unawakened, she was a complete child of untaught nature, and nothing to guide her but her own good, warm heart.

He who is the merciful Father of all his creatures, he who provides for the wants of the minutest insect, leaves no one among his moral, intelligent children entirely deserted,—and this poor young girl, so sadly to seek, as regarded true guidance, had been endowed by nature with that, the want of which guidance can rather supply than give—the most generous, loving nature, I ever knew.

But alas! how imperfect are the best natural endowments without the leading divine!

Without that, which is—as of course it must be, essential to the completeness of any being framed for the great inheritance—Light!—The true Light!

It was light, she wanted, poor young thing.

She could only blindly grope, or rashly plunge forwards in that dim twilight which obscured altogether many an object, and showed the rest so faint and distorted.

The eye of the mind in youth may be compared to the physical eye of a new-born child—the vision is imperfect. We must learn to *see*—learn to distinguish and disentangle the objects presented before us, in order to appreciate the relations of magnitude and distance, before we can gain information by seeing.

But there are instincts given to the pure of mind and heart, as to the healthy eye ; instincts which, however derived, lead the faculty to its perfection of use, imperceptibly—we know not how—and these did not fail this young, good-hearted girl, though the main help, the help of faith and prayer in faith were still wanting.

The room now assigned to Lady Emma, as eldest daughter and grown-up young lady, was far removed from the school-room and adjacent nurseries. It lay, in fact, at the extreme end of the other gallery of which we

have spoken, and facing the south, commanded a beautiful view of the woods and lake.

A large oriel window terminating that wing of the house, looked full upon this scene. This ancient window, with its rich stone mullions, and its large, wide, opening casements, gave a peculiar beauty to the room itself, and displayed the fine prospect without to the highest advantage. It possessed, also, that old-fashioned, but most comfortable thing, a broad window-seat, from which, and with the casements open, one might enjoy the lovely landscape to satiety.

She came up to her room for the first time, after having bid good night to her father and her mother, and started with surprise and pleasure as she entered it.

It was so large, that the faint light of a very miserable, ill-made candle, which she carried in her hand, was inadequate to abate the effect of a bright full moon, which shone upon the oriel window, casting the beautifully carved mullions into broad effects of light and shadow, which fell through the lower panes, mingling with the tinted crimson and blue of the upper, upon the uncarpeted floor.

A lofty bed, with velvet curtains, stood at one end of the room; chairs, once most rich and magnificent, covered with piled velvet, were arranged with grave solemnity around; a toilet-table, with a small glass set in a frame of filigree silver; old grim pictures hanging upon the walls, and a lofty, carved chimney-piece—bare of every other species of usual chimney ornament—completed the furniture of the room.

Gloomy it looked, but it was a gloom such as the daughter of an ancient house should love and like. It was venerable, and told of grave, earnest, and serious times—times of a stern and simple grandeur—when brave men and warriors—and women, worthy to be the wives and mothers of such men, had lived here.

Oh! how unlike those of her day.

How unlike to the flash, the tinsel, the glare—the luxury and extravagance—the penury and distress—the shifts and subterfuges of the present!

The sober apartment,—its rigid simplicity,—its grave magnificence,—spoke to her of times in which she would have loved to live.

She should have been the daughter of the house as it existed *then*—that was what she felt herself fitted for—the O'Connor's child—not the elegant idol of fashion—the admired of a ball-room, and the victim of a gambling club.

Her maid was on her knees, unpacking her trunks, in one corner of the apartment,—and the light and beautiful gauzes, ribbons, and laces, the elegant bonnets, and the fanciful dresses, were hanging upon the chairs, or laid over the old ebony tables.

It was a strange contrast. She looked at them with disgust; they seemed to bring into this scene—to her so solemn and sincere—all the gaudy, false, and treacherous disguises of that world she had just left.

The dressing-table, with its antique furnishing, was already prepared for the night; and numerous light, flimsy articles, for use or ornament, were laid there reflected in that heavy silver-framed mirror, and mingling with the antique, richly-chased, though small silver boxes, with which the table was ornamented.

“I shall not want you to night—go to bed,

Elliott, you must be tired—You have laid everything out—good night.”

“Ah! my dear lady—you mustn’t be left in this dismal place by yourself—and at the very end of the gallery, too!—I’m sure it’s enough to make one die of fright. Let me get a sofa-bed, or I don’t mind lying on the floor, if need be—but leave you for the first night in such a lonesome place as this, indeed I can’t—I declare it looks more like a church than a bed-room—a convent than a gentleman’s house—and I dare say it’s haunted.”

“Thank you, Elliott, but I have not the least objection to be left by myself—I would very much rather be so—So good night, you must be tired to death, and I want to be called at seven o’clock in the morning—Good night—Now do go, there’s a good girl.”

But Elliott, who was a good-natured creature, hesitated; and lifted up her miserable little candle, as if to scan the room—It looked to her eyes dreadfully gloomy.

“Dear Lady Emma!—Do please to look up—Why—if there isn’t!—Good gracious

me!—it is—it is—it's a bat! What shall I do—what shall I do—oh!—oh!”

Screaming, and running to the door—

“It's a bat—a bat—I declare!—Good gracious me—good gracious me!”

“And if it is a bat, you silly girl, it won't hurt you. Did you never see a bat before?”

For Emma's education in the wilds had, at least, done her that good office, that she could look even upon a bat, without any very great discomposure of the nerves.

“Oh, my goodness!—I wouldn't be near a bat--no not for the universe! Oh! there it is again—there it is again!—don't, my lady—oh, don't, my lady!”

“What harm could it do you, if it were a bat?—but it is no such terrific animal—its only a large moth,” said Emma, composedly catching, and very tenderly taking hold of, one of those giant moths which sometimes are seen in the evening.

“Well, well, my dear young lady—it's very horrid whatever it is—and I never was in such a place before, never before in all my life,”—said Elliott, half crying.

“There, out it is,” said her mistress,

going to the window, and restoring her captive to liberty,—“don’t be so foolish—but you are so tired you don’t know what to do—get away to bed—and have no fear for me,—Do you think I am not used to such things?—Why, child, it is my father’s castle—and I was born and bred here.”

“That’s true enough,” remarked Elliott, —“and if my lady would really rather that I did go,”—her desire to be off increasing every moment,—“why I’ll Hark ! What’s that ?”

“Nothing but a screech owl, silly girl—you look quite pale.”

“A screech owl!—Oh, my lady!—A screech owl;—then sure as I stand here, there’s a death going on somewhere,—there’s somebody dead that belongs to us. . . There, again!—My goodness, what a fearful noise it is. My grandmother used to say—‘Whenever any one hears the screech owl, there will be a death,’—but I never heard one before. My dear young lady, which of them all can it be?”—added she, trembling more and more. —“None of mine,—none of mine, I do hope.”

“None of yours, rest certain,”—Emma said, shuddering a little, in spite of herself, as the drear, unearthly cry was repeated from the woods. “If it bodes mischief to any, it is to one of this family;—but do go away, I want to be alone.”

At last she succeeded in getting rid of her handmaid.

The door closed behind Elliott,—and then poor Emma heaved a great sigh, and having taken off her dress, unbound her hair, and put on her long white dressing gown, she at last obtained the quiet and solitude she had been longing for, and half-sitting, half-lying, upon the great, broad window seat, she leaned her head upon her hands, and looked out into the deep and wondrous beauty of the night.

The lake gleaming in the light of the large, pale moon lay spread before her, the noble woods and plantations stretching solemnly round, tinted by the white beams, the sky was deeply blue, few stars were to be discerned, the woods came sweeping down to the water, forming tiny bays and tufted promontories, and the grass and all its rough

inequalities, veiled in that dubious light, fell in a soft descent to the shore—it was lovely.

The owl still kept up, from time to time, its melancholy ominous cry—every thing else was profoundly quiet.

And now came the hour—the still—the silent—the hour of thought.

First she looked up to that heaven above, as if she would penetrate its mysterious depths, then she gazed upon the earthly picture, stretched below in its wealth of beauty,—at last her eye glanced upon her little pigmy, sorrowful, longing, bewildered self—an atom in this vast creation—but, ah poor atom! how full of feeling, sentiment, and thought.

What was she?—Why here?

Why was she sent here?—To be happy?—alas!—alas!

That could not be why she was sent here—for she was very unhappy.

As a girl she had been happy.

For a few short hours in town, in the presence of that loved one, she had tasted what rapturous happiness was; but now it was all over. A heavy cloud had fallen upon

her heart. He, whom she loved so dearly, had proved unworthy,—and she should never—never be happy again.

And those large, lustrous, girlish eyes of hers were lifted up in a sort of bewildered remonstrance. Why, when so many things were happy, might not she be happy?—Other girls were allowed to love, and to be blest in their love!—Other young men were giddy and careless and did a great many wrong things—she had lived long enough in the world to know that—yet they were allowed to go on and be happy;—Why were they two to be so especially miserable?

And then—as she leaned that sweet face of her's upon her two hands, looking out upon the night, her fair hair streaming over her arms,—Greuse should have painted her so—she went on thinking more and more sadly as the scenes of that very day came to her recollection. The disorder and misrule that pervaded this home of her ancestors!—that horrid betting-book in her father's very hand!—her mother's many cares,—but, ah! such strangely trivial cares—and last that little neglected group of

children crowded together in their school-room—no place of schooling for them !

And she thought how much of wrong-doing there lay at the foundation of all this evil—it was a gloomy, despairing picture ! Lastly, with additional regret—ah, regret !—cruel regret !—the thought of how it might have been, if Captain Aubrey had not proved unworthy, added pain, amounting almost to agony, to her other causes of sorrow.

As his wife, under his care, and led by his guidance, how much she might have done for these poor children ! But now she shuddered to think what their fate might be. The boys might take to the worst courses, unrestrained and undisciplined as they were—and grow up to become like her eldest brother. That brother—now nearly half an idiot—brought to that state by drunkenness and debauchery—or perhaps like Algernon, the dear, faulty Algernon ! ruined by play !—or like her father !—alas !—alas !

And the girls, too—What would become of them ? Would they be left, deprived of the advantages, few as they had been, which she had herself enjoyed, to grow up into a beauty far

exceeding her own—for so the dear creature in her humility thought—to be introduced, all unprepared, into that dangerous, delusive great world—perhaps to be shipwrecked by its temptations.

Alas!—if she had married Edward Aubrey, the task to introduce them would have been her's—for she knew how gladly her mother would have devolved it upon her, and her sisters might have been saved—those dear girls! She still saw Felicia's abashed, half-jealous, sorrowful look—still heard Millicent's accents of love—still felt the warm, fond arms of the little Lucinda about her neck!

But as thus her thoughts wandered in darkness and despair, a light seemed gently to dawn upon her, and one of those suggestive ideas was granted, which enter the mind one knows not whence or how—like the words of a wise and faithful friend, raising us from despondency—awakening us to a sense of our mistakes, and pointing out a new, and, until then, unthought-of course of action—Something she might do even now.

Scanty as her means were, still she might do something. She had lost Edward Aubrey

—but all was not lost. She might be of some help to her sisters—at least, she could do her best for them, for her mother, for everyone. She would live to serve them all.

And then, like a sweet, soothing dream, the peace, which passeth show, stole over her—that peace which attends upon honest, good intentions; and with it hope revived again. Perhaps, after all, Edward might return, a better and a purified man, and he should find her well-doing; and God—yes, she came to that name at last—God might bless her good intentions—and bring him to better thoughts—as in his mercy he had brought her to better thoughts.—Yes—they might some time or other be happy together yet.

But at that moment the screech-owl sent forth its wild cry—this time it seemed nearly close upon her ear—and she shuddered, drew herself in, and shut-to the window.

But her head once laid upon her pillow, the kind, sisterly anxieties resumed their empire—and Emma lay for hours planning for the general good, and thinking of what she might be able to do.

The next morning she rose early as she had intended, and dressed in the simplest dress she possessed, left her room, and made her way to the children's apartments.

If she had been shocked and disgusted by what she had seen the evening before, there was far more reason to be dissatisfied now.

She entered the room miscalled the school-room, but it was empty. No one was in it, and no one appeared to have been in it since the evening before. The chairs were standing about in the utmost disorder, the tables and floor were stained with dirt, and covered with litter: broken toys of the very humblest description, and a few torn and dirty books, were lying up and down—the windows were fast closed, even the breath of the sweet morning air was shut out, where there was no other earthly thing fresh or good to be enjoyed.

She went to the casement, and with great difficulty turned the rusted hasp and unclosed it. It seemed as if it had not been opened for years.

Then she began to pick up some of the disfigured books, in order to arrange them upon a shelf at the other end of the room,

intended for a book-shelf it would appear, though there was not a book upon it, everything in that scene of confusion, lying just where it ought not.

As she took the volumes up and examined them one by one, she was struck with the nature of their contents.

The school-books were such as might have been bought for the use of her great grandmother—very probably the case—for not a sign of the progress of modern improvement was to be found among them.

Dyke's spelling-book, with the venerable figure of the Doctor in his large wig, and its formidable rows of six-syllable words—a Latin vocabulary with grotesque wooden cuts and a coarseness in the choice of the words that made her shut it with disgust—Porney's French Grammar and *La Bagatelle*—Goody Two Shoes—a tattered volume of the Arabian Nights, unprepared for children—a very vulgar English translation of the beautiful *Berquin*—the "Hundred animals" with all its lies—such was the collection. Books which at least teach us what the men and women, who wrote and used such about a century ago, must

have been, make us cease to wonder that they grew up as they did, and lead us to hope everything, from the new and better system in this respect. Upon these books she had not been educated herself, because the excellent Miss Fisher had been her governess—but the little ones were then too young to profit by these advantages. The works out of which Miss Fisher had instructed her were chiefly that lady's own property—and had been carried away with her when Lady Emma and Mary, after following her to England, had finished, as the Marchioness thought, their education. The expensive governess had therefore been dismissed—and old nurse, with such assistance as the curate of the parish, a very stupid and illiterate young man, could give, had been for the present substituted.

Nothing in fact could exceed the indifference and neglect, upon the part of the Marchioness, of the important subject of early training. Such a mode of carrying on things would be absolutely impossible, it is to be hoped, even in Ireland and in the very worst-managed families, at this time of day—for the influence of good example diffuses itself

with slow but irresistible force even in the most unpromising quarters—and the progress that has thus insensibly been made during the last half-century, I think, often escapes attention.

Whilst Emma was thus employed, a loud roaring was heard proceeding from one of the adjoining rooms, and hastening to learn the cause of the piteous outcry, she returned into the passage, and making her way to the door of the chamber from whence the noise came, opened it and entered.

And what was the cause of these screams of distress?

A child was being washed.

Washed, it is true, with stinging soap lathered all over the face, eyes and mouth included—which latter stood wide open—rubbed down by no gentler hand than that of a stout, rough girl, who was wreaking her vengeance upon, as it would seem, rather than bathing in the translucent wave, the poor little victim that stood there roaring and kicking with all its might.

The rest of the children in various groups and attitudes were being dressed, one after

another, by old nurse, and various other maids in attendance, all looking rough and untidy as possible. The whole room was one scene of the most revolting confusion. Emma stood there, and sickened with disgust.

Was this what she herself had been, in her infancy, subjected to? and could perception be so blunted by custom that, as a child, she had never been aware of it?

Even so.

But she recollected it all perfectly now, and could only marvel at her own insensibility.

But that insensibility was at an end. The impropriety, approaching almost to guilt, of allowing this state of things to continue, struck her forcibly, and with it came the new sense of duty. She was awakened, as from a long and blind indifference, to a totally fresh view of her relations with things.

All that was generous and good in her nature was aroused; and be it said to her honour, that whilst resolving to play the true elder sister's part, and devote herself to the well-being of those poor little ones, she cast not one reproachful thought upon her mother. She had the candour to

appreciate her difficulties and disadvantages, and with true goodness of heart to set herself to repair evils, instead of censuring them.

Her appearance in this noisy, ill-managed nursery had already produced some effect. It was like a sort of angel vision—from that beautiful face and figure, so delicate and pure, streamed forth, as it were, an emanation of peace and light! The tumult for the moment was hushed—the little roarer's cries subsided into low sobs—the noisy group of children quarrelling and fighting for shoes and stockings looked ashamed.

She observed the effect with good hopes for the future, but she made no remark, and quitting the apartment, went immediately to her mother's dressing-room.

It was getting late, and the Marchioness was already dressed, but she was still there.

She was sitting at a table, with a great, big book, bound in rough leather, before her, looking over, and busily engaged, trying vainly to examine and understand the house-steward's accounts.

She looked exceedingly annoyed, and completely puzzled.

“Who’s that?”

“It is I, dear mama.”

“My own child!—how fagged and pale you are looking! Do sit down, Emma—You were tired with your journey, yesterday—why did you get up so early?”

“I was not so very early, dear mama—and the morning air here is so sweet—but I could hardly sleep last night, mama, for thinking.”

“Thinking!—My dear child, what is the use of your thinking?—Thinking is the worst thing in the world for your complexion. Take a little laudanum if you can’t sleep, Emma. That will help you to get over it. Indeed, my dear, you *must* get over it—You’ll worry me dreadfully else—and heaven knows! there are worries enough without that—I can’t think what’s to become of us all!”

“My dear mother, things do want looking to, indeed.”

“You need not tell me that,” said the mother rather sharply. “Everybody can see *that*—But how is it to be set about? These accounts!—I can’t conceive how they have managed to spend such a heap of money—

I'm sure it looks as if nothing had been done, for the place is in wretched want of repair—the rain has got in and half ruined that fine dining-room ceiling, painted by . . . I forget the man's name—and here is a bill as long as an old novel for repairs of the roof.”—

“Mama—I'm very sorry you are to be vexed and worried just now, for I wanted to talk to you of something still more urgent than even the repairs of the house.”

“Oh, there are a thousand things to be talked about—one does not know what to turn to first.”

“The children!—”

“Oh! for gracious sake, don't begin to talk to me about the children. Sure it will be time enough, thank Heaven! to think about the children these three years hence—I'm certain of one thing, we've no money to spend on *them*.”

“But their education?—”

“Nonsense, of their education—People make such a fuss about education now-a-days I don't see what good it does. You've had an education—and so has Louvain, and so has Algernon—and you're not married—and I

do not see that they are the least the better for theirs—and I'm sure there's no money for *education*."

"But my dear mother, something must be done," said Lady Emma, sitting down, and fixing her eyes, so beautiful in their seriousness, upon her mother's face.

"Well, well, something shall in due time,—but it does not press . . . For Heaven's sake, don't worry me about it now!"

She saw her mother's careworn look, and really felt that it was cruel to press the subject upon her at that moment.

She was discreet and patient—rare virtues at her early age—but sorrow had in some degree taught one, apt to learn, how to deal with others in their troubles.

"I see, dear mama, that I must not talk to you about these things just now—By and by, perhaps—"

"Well—well—by and by ; but I'm sure I don't know when that by and by is to come, for my head is splitting with business. Such a load of things to be looked to. Everything gone wrong—and money!—where on earth are we to get money? For goodness' sake,

Emma, don't look so uncomfortable. I don't want you to be vexed with these bothers. Why, my child, it's enough to cover that pretty face of yours with wrinkles, and make you as bilious as I am. No, Emma, keep up your good looks, or I think I shall go crazy . . . As for the children, as I said, thank Heaven! there's time enough to think of them. The girls won't want finishing up these three years—and as for the boys, why they must get along as they can. For as to sending them to school it's utterly out of the question—But, thank goodness! there's India.”

Emma made no reply. She sat there, with her arms fallen into her lap, her head hanging down, and her eyes bent upon the floor.

“Well, child!” said her mother, impatiently.

Emma raised her eyes.

Her mother's face was, in truth, the very picture of worry and care.

“Mama—I am so sorry for you—”

Laying her soft hand gently upon the dry, wrinkled one that rested, still holding the pen, upon the steward's book—

“Mama—I am so very sorry for you.”

“Are you, my Emma?”

And the mother’s eye twinkled—that eye, usually so hard and cold, melted as it turned upon the honest, loving face of the loving child,—

“Are you, Emma? But what can you do for me? Take care of yourself, my love—that’s all you can do.”

“Mother—I can do more—”

“What more?”

“Mother—will you give me the care of your children.”

“My dear girl—how you *do* talk!”

“At least till you have leisure to arrange some better plan. Give me authority, dear mama—let me have the regulating of the school-room. You cannot think what a state things are in,—Have you been into it?”

“How should I have found time! Do you think I can effect impossibilities? I have not rested a moment since I set my foot in this house. Nurse brought them down to see me—they look a little rough, to be sure—but they are all well, and seem happy enough, thank God!”

Ah, dear mother! you cannot conceive what a state things are in—but I don't want oh! I would not add to your worries for the world! Only let me have authority to do the best I can for them. I am very young—but Miss Fisher took pains with me. Oh! what a pity it was to part with Miss Fisher—Why did we not keep her?”

“For the best reason in the world—if you would but bear it in mind, Emma. How was Miss Fisher to be paid?—Why, we gave her a hundred a year.”

Emma reflected with sad surprise upon the hundreds and hundreds lavished—absolutely thrown away on vain expenses—and the thousands, as she feared lost in what, under her father's circumstances, amounted to crime. Like all other young creatures, ignorant of the dreadful slavery of vice, she marvelled at this to her most incredible infatuation. She was happily inexperienced in the darkness—the bitter darkness of that outer world, that region of sin and misery, where no peace is to be found—but in its place wailing and gnashing of teeth; helpless submission to the great adversary; and neither the attempt too

often, nor even the desire to escape. But she made no remark. She only, with much humility, repeated her prayer, that her mother would grant her authority in the school-room and nursery.

“It will do me good—It will keep my thoughts from other things,” she ended by saying.

“Why true, so it may,” said the mother, as if struck by a sudden thought—“Well, if you really will promise not to tire and wear yourself out by doing too much, be it as you please; it may serve, as you say, to divert your thoughts into a new channel—as for the children, there is plenty of time, I tell you, to think of *them*; but do as you like, child.”

“Then will you be so kind as to speak to old nurse, and tell her it is to be so?”

“I don’t know half how she’ll like it, for she is an odd, obstinate old woman—but I can’t quarrel with nurse, Emma—who am I to leave the children with, when we go to town next spring?—they are quite safe with her.”

“To town next spring!—my dear mother!

I thought you said we were so poor—How can we possibly afford to go, next spring, to town?”

“Oh, we must cut down some trees, or do something. Mr Mahoney must find us money for that—You don’t think, Emma, I’m going to shut you up in this wilderness, and not give you another chance of establishing yourself—when that’s once done, we may live quiet for a year or two.”

“Mama, you are very kind, very good to think so much of me, but you know that is over now,—I can never wish to go to town again, and as for establishing myself! dearest mother! there is only one, and though he is gone away, he *may* come back some time or other. Dear mother, let us wait in patience—I know he will come again.”

“A likely story! when his father has disinherited him.”

“His father may change his mind,” and the blue eyes, filled with all the brightness of confidence and hope, were fixed upon her mother’s face.

“Why to be sure—but well, well, it’s time enough to discuss all this when next spring comes.”

“And in the meantime, may I take charge of the children?”

“Yes—yes—anything to pass the time away.”

“Then will you speak to nurse this morning?”

“Why not now,” rising up and shutting the great, heavy book, “yes, come along, and then we’ll have breakfast, and see what my lord is about.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Quick, quick, I fear it is too late,
And I shall die.

TENNYSON.

AND so Emma was installed as empress of that noisy kingdom, the school-room and nursery at Hurstmonceaux Castle. And with her heart lightened by hope, which the conversation with her mother had raised to almost positive expectation, she set herself cheerfully to the task she had undertaken.

A task far and far beyond her powers to execute as she wished, and this she soon found ; yet still one of those undertakings, in which, if we fall sadly short of the accomplishment of our designs, yet something is done by the mere attempt, and all that is done is useful—a mitigation of, if not a triumph over, evil.

She set herself consequently to work ; and a certain degree of improvement, small, it is true, yet indisputable, was soon apparent.

Her first attempt was to bring the little external world around her into something like order, and this seemed a task easy enough. She got together these rough, untaught handmaids, of whom there were at least double the necessary number employed ; that is to say, so they had been properly employed, but this was the case only for a small portion of each day ; the rest of their time being spent in gossiping, lounging, and dawdling.

These inefficient maidens, however, as a commencement of her operations, she set to scrubbing, and brushing, and rubbing, and putting things in order.

At first the attempt to operate with soap and water upon the room was as loudly resisted, as ablution had been by the poor screaming child in the nursery.

Old, obstinate Nurse protested that it would be the death of the children to be put upon the damp floor ; and sharp was the contest between her and her young lady before she could be persuaded, that to open

the casements, and let in the warm air of an August day, would not increase, instead of diminishing, the danger.

Emma's temper was warm and high, and she increased her difficulties by the way in which she encountered opposition.—She was out of patience with the old woman's obstinacy, and a sharp encounter, which wasted her own powers and diminished her influence over the perverseness she had to deal with, was the consequence.

She had yet to learn how “to rule by consenting, by submitting sway.”—Indeed, I believe in her present degree of moral culture, she would, like many other well-meaning young things of her age, have esteemed it almost base to disguise her feelings of impatience, or affect a gentleness she did not feel.—I once heard of a young creature saying, that it was very mean to seem to be in a good humour when one was not. The case was something the same as regarded the rough Irish girls she had to work with. She attempted to effect her purpose by high words, instead of by reasonable remonstrance and persuasion.—Now, as it happens that there

are very few people—and, more especially, very few rough ignorant girls, who do not feel inclined to rebel against high words—whilst the roughest of them are open to reason and persuasion, poor Lady Emma found the task of even getting the school-room cleaned extremely difficult.—But one strength she possessed—that of perseverance; and by dint of this, in spite of all her mistakes, she got through; by six o'clock in the evening, an hour before it was time to dress for dinner. And there she sits, at the head of the long deal table, now well scoured, with chairs properly dusted and arranged upon each side—in a clean sweet-smelling room, with three large casement windows wide open—and the floor strewn with lavender and rosemary—surrounded by a group of rosy-faced joyous children, with their splendid heads of hair combed and in proper order, their hands well washed, and all grinning joyously at the prospect of a large cake which Emma had brought them from London.

She looked round and felt so happy !

She had been too busy all day for melancholy thoughts. Her spirits, naturally

cheerful and buoyant, had recovered their elasticity under the influence of this labour for others—What had been hope, was fast amounting to certainty.

Patience—and all would be well.

“And in the meantime,” she thought, “was it not quite lucky that she had been forced to come home?—What would have become of these children if she had been married this spring?—It was better as it was, and everything would come right—she was sure of it—her heart told her so.”

Ah! that heart—it felt so light and happy—there was no tale too flattering for it to tell.

“Now, Ulick, you shall cut the cake, because you are a very good boy and have been helping me all the afternoon to put the books in order—and, Felicia, you shall hand it round, because you have been putting all the toys straight—Edward and James—you are two little dears, and you shall sit at the bottom of the table on each side of nurse—and, Milly and Lucy, you shall sit on each side of me—and baby-boy shall sit on nurse’s lap—and Emma will pour out tea for you all—and

we'll make no slops or litter—but be so good and happy.”

And Charlotte, cutting bread and butter for her brothers and sisters, could not and did not look more winning, than this sweet creature—So young and yet so wise—so vehement and yet so good—so prudent yet so generous. All in her own imperfect way, it must be owned, for she was but a mere inexperienced girl, but done with such true sincerity, love, and goodwill!

The one was a woman—a formed woman—this one was scarcely more than a child—but never did Goethe show his knowledge of human nature better than in exhibiting Charlotte to her lover, in this most endearing view.

But we must not linger over these scenes, sweet as they are to my fancy. Time and fate press on, and the heavy cloud of grief—grief, helpless grief—grief for the irrevocable—for the dead! is rising above the horizon, like the cloud no bigger than a man's hand; and soon

there will be darkness, and tempest, and torrents of rain.

Intelligence travelled slowly into remote corners as this, when railroads and electric telegraphs, and even fleet, well-ordered mail coaches were not; and ten days had this work of improvement been carried on, well or ill, progressing or retrograding, according to the ordinary course of all plans for moral advancement—more especially when guided by a young, inexperienced hand—before the blow fell.

It was the morning of the eleventh day.

She had risen, blythe as a lark, and had been two hours abroad that beautiful, sunshiny morning, with her little brothers and sisters, enjoying the woodland walks—all fresh, and sweet, and dewy, with the sunbeams glistening through the branches of the nobly-spreading oaks and beeches. The little company had been employed gathering the few late flowers still left upon the arbutus, which formed the beautiful undergrowth of the woods, and watching the squirrels, that

abounded among the trees, or the wild birds still left which were creeping among the branches. Happy—thrice happy—as such young life is, when allowed, a free denizen of nature, to enjoy all the wealth of its freshness and beauty undisturbed.

They had been, also, upon the lake, and the boys, already were become more disciplined and obedient, had been allowed the privilege of rowing under the guidance of the old boatman; and the children had gathered the white and yellow water lilies—so richly lovely, with their leaves like wax, and their golden pistils—the treasures of childhood; and they had watched the coot sailing with its brood upon the bosom of the lake, and the little water-hens daintily tripping over the broad water-lily leaves; and they had seen the fish glancing among the green grottoes and caves—that fairy-land which lies beneath the transparent waters.

They had all come home, a rosy, joyous group, hanging clustering around that tall, bright creature—that young nymph of the woods, for so she looked, towering like some fair sapling among them. And they were

entering by a glass door, in one of the wings of the castle which led by a flight of private stairs to their own apartments.

Her bonnet was half thrown back, and the large curls were stirring over her face—her bright, happy face—for she was still childlike, ever under the influence of the moment. One little girl and two little boys were clinging to her gown; the others—a merry group—were shouting and laughing. She was laughing too, and it was as much as she could do to resist shouting with the rest, instead of striving to maintain a grave face, and bidding them not make such a noise.

Elliott stood at the head of the stairs.

“Oh! my lady!—Are you come back at last? Here’s my lady Marchioness has been sending to look for you all about. Do pray go to her sleeping-room please, my lady. She’s in a terrible hurry to see you.”

“Is anything amiss?—What does mama want? Go, you little good-for-nothings. Elliott, wait a moment. Please tell my mother I will be with her as soon as I have got these little things to their breakfast.”

“Please, my lady, I’ll take the children,

for the Marchioness seems as if she couldn't wait. She's been hurrying all the men in the house after you."

"Oh, then, pray take care of them, and take them safe to nurse. Now, be good children—let me go. Milly, let go my gown. Naughty Edward, loose my arm—"

"Edward"—she always spoke more softly and looked more tenderly than ever, when she uttered the name of Edward.

There was a little battle, and a good deal of shouting and laughing; but escaped from them at last, her face still beaming and glowing with health and enjoyment, her fine hair tumbling about her in disorder—so beautiful and so bright that it was like sunshine to look at her—she made her way to her mother's dressing-room, and entered gaily, with a—

"Dear mama, I am so sorry I was not to be found—but we have had such a delicious"

But her mother looked up. Her face was enough.

"Good Heavens! Mama!—Mother! what has happened?"

“Sit down, Emma dear—Sit down, my love—not upon that small chair—put yourself upon the sofa—Emma, child—sit down by me.—”

And she took her daughter’s hand, and still looking anxiously at her—her own face pale as death, drew her down beside her.

“Mama—What is it?—what *has* happened?”

“Oh, my darling love—Summon all your fortitude.”

But the poor girl began to tremble from head to foot, as one has seen the inimitable Rachel tremble.

“Don’t tremble so—don’t shiver so.—Oh, my dear—we must bear things—”

“I know it—I know it—Only put me out of suspense—What has happened—Papa? No—no,”

The Marchioness shook her head.

“No—no—it’s Edward!—Captain Aubrey! What of Edward?”

“Oh, my dear—dear girl—”

“He has not—he cannot—we hoped better things.—Oh, Edward! not again . . . !”

“No, my love—Nothing of that sort, I believe.”

“Then, what is it?—Oh, mother!—”

She lifted up her eyes imploringly for a moment, then suddenly covered her face with her hands, and burst out into loud cries and tears.

“I need not tell you—I see you guess it all—” said her mother, mournfully,—“be patient, my love.”

But Emma wept as if her heart would break.

“My dear—don’t—don’t—”

“Oh, mama! mama! let me—let me—let me cry—let me cry. Edward! my dear, dear Edward.—He is dead—He is dead, and I shall never, never, see him again—Edward, dear Edward.”

“Don’t cry so, Emma—Emma, you break my heart;—don’t cry so—it breaks my heart to hear you.”

“Oh, mama!—mama!—but I’ll be better—let me cry—Oh mother! mother!”

And the mother opened her arms—they *were* a mother’s after all—and the poor girl fell weeping upon her bosom, stretching out her arms, and clasping her mother, and nestling there like a wounded, fluttering bird.

The Marchioness had not a bad heart.

She pressed her child to it, and tears fell upon that head, tears such as she had scarcely ever been known to shed before—they now fell in large drops.

Oh those tears, that blessed rain in great sorrow!—watering and softening the earth, and preparing the divine harvest.

So they wept together for a long, long time,—till tears had expended themselves, and at last Emma raised her head, and looked up in her mother's face—Sweetly, and mournfully, and quietly, and as if she would be patient and good, though she kept sobbing like a little child.

“You have not told me,” she said.

“My child, his brother has written.”—

“William Aubrey?”—

“Yes, William—and such a beautiful letter it is.”

A slight frown passed over Emma's face.

“Tell me—tell me.”

“It gives few particulars—Mr Aubrey the father was very ill, and Edward was coming back to visit him—Mr Aubrey was staying at this cottage by the sea-side; and in some way

poor Captain Aubrey fell over the cliffs, which in that place are particularly steep and dangerous. He was seen to make the fatal slip, and was lost in the water. It was a high spring-tide—at which times the sea is many feet deep close to these cliffs, and the waves were running tremendously high there at the time.—He was gone in a moment.”—

“My God!”—

There was a long silence.

She lay there with her head still leaning upon her mother's breast, gazing, as it were, vacantly upon the wall before her.

She neither spoke nor moved, and her mother had the discretion to sit quietly, holding her in her arms, and watching her with eyes filled with most tender pity.

At last the poor girl slowly lifted up her head.

“Have you the letter?”

“Yes—would you like to see it?”

“Very—very much.”

“There it is.”

“MY DEAR LORD—

“The interest with which you have been pleased to honour our family, and the relations in which some members of it once stood towards each other, make me feel it right to announce to you, without delay, the fatal event which has taken place among us.

“My brother Edward is lost to us for ever.

“My father had lately been suffering, as perhaps your lordship may have heard, from a very dangerous attack of illness, which excited the greatest alarm among his friends. My brother, as probably also your lordship might have been informed, had left us somewhat hastily for the continent—but it is not necessary that we should now dwell upon or again allude to circumstances, which ought to be buried in eternal oblivion under the waters of that ocean, where my poor brother for ever lies.

“My father had been persuaded to try change of air, and had gone down to a little cottage of his, situated near the sea, almost upon the very edge of the precipitous cliffs which bound the south coast of Kent.

“Hearing of his illness, my brother, it would seem, had hastened to England. He

came alone, and perfectly unattended, called at my father's house in town, there learned that he was gone into Kent, and followed him.

“He was seen in the mail-coach, where he was observed to be taciturn and melancholy. He was also seen to ascend the cliff by some steep steps cut in the turf and leading to the house.

“About a quarter of an hour afterwards, a man watching with a telescope the progress of certain vessels which were making their way up channel, chanced to turn his glass in the direction of the cliffs fronting the house. He saw my brother—though but for one moment—standing on the edge of the cliff—and the next he was precipitated into the waves.

“It was high spring tide, when the water is very deep, even close to the cliff.

“The spectator dropped his glass, and, shouting for help, hurried to the spot. But he had to make his way round a little bay, of which the promontory upon which he was standing, and that from which poor Edward fell, formed the extremities. When he reached

the spot, all trace of my unfortunate brother had disappeared.

“Not a vestige of him remained, except one glove, marked with his name, which was found, as if dropped by him, at a few yards’ distance from the precipice.

“My father had just breathed his last, before the fatal catastrophe was discovered. He was spared that agony, at least.

“I am sure that your lordship will pardon this hurried and, I fear, confused account. I will say nothing of myself—my state of mind is such as to render excuses and apologies unnecessary.

“I scarcely at present know what I write; but I would not expose your family, by any neglect of mine, to the risk of first seeing this intelligence in the public prints, to which it is certain to find its way.

“I have the honour to remain

“Lord Hurstmonceaux’s obedient servant,

“WILLIAM AUBREY.”

She laid the letter down upon the table, without speaking, and again rested her head upon her mother’s bosom.

Presently she took up the letter once more, and read it through.

She finished with a heavy sigh, and then raising herself said—"If you please, mama, I had better go to bed."

"Yes, my darling. Come along, let me put you to bed."

And tenderly and kindly the mother undressed her, and laid her in her bed—looking so pale, and faded,—sweet broken flower !

"Will you please to let down the window blinds, and shut out the light, dear mama?"

The light! oh, that light! so insupportable in the death sorrow.

The Marchioness did as her daughter desired, and drew the curtains round the large high bed, so as to deepen the shadow a little; and then she kissed her, and said—

"Is all right, my child?"

"Yes, thank you, mama. And now I had better be by myself a little,—And please, dear mama, just call in and look after the children."

CHAPTER XIV.

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Silence before the mercy-seat
Befits the faith we own,
When hearts bereaved a parted soul pursue,
And seek to learn what martyrs never knew.

MONTGOMERY.

It was a deep, silent grief,—
A grief that passeth show.

She rose up from that bed of sorrow, pale and faded, the sweet, rosy bloom upon her cheek, once so beautiful, gone! and the gay brightness of the eye clouded—yet looking, as many would have thought, far more interesting, and still more lovely than ever.

She had been obliged to keep her room for some days. It is true the morning of the day after she had received this terrible blow,

making a violent effort with herself, she had left her bed, and endeavoured with true courage to take her accustomed place in the school-room—but it would not do. Her head swam, her eyes were dazzled; sounds of confusion were in her ears; she was obliged to give it up, and leave the apartment, with its restless, noisy inmates, and the constant motion and incessant chatter which so distracted her poor weakened nerves, and seek in the solitude of her own room, that quiet, which the physical condition, consequent upon heavy grief, requires.

So there she remained for some days withdrawn from her family and judiciously and kindly left by her mother much to herself—and the time thus allowed was not mis-spent. Great part of it indeed was passed in weeping,—but it was not bitter and passionate, but gentle and patient weeping. She had been awakened through the love she bore her little brothers and sisters to a sense of the value of time and strength, and she endeavoured to compose her spirits by such simple means as her inexperienced philosophy suggested. Her apprehension of religion—of that light

which lighteth every man that comes into the world, and which is seen so marvellously to help and illuminate the most uncultivated and ignorant mind, was very imperfect; still the blessed influence of sorrow was not without its effect—feebly the twilight began to break before the approaching dawn.

She thought much; pondering upon the ways of this strange world, and their termination in the fearful mystery of death—so inexplicable to all—and most of all to those young creatures so full of warm life within.

He was gone—ah! where?

And her yearning, yearning heart in this world shall never see him more—Poor widowed heart!

Yet it was a young, healthy heart, and He who sends death upon this earth, rupturing the dearest ties, and turning the once bright world into a dreary desert,—is likewise the same, whose right hand leadeth through the barren waste, and causeth fresh fountains to gush up in the wilderness,—We know not, how it is—but we all of us in our turn feel it—that wondrous support which carries us through these horrible trials.

The wholesome return of the natural spirits, the fresh spring of existence, coming, we know not whence, that rises up, refreshing and restoring us to the living world again—bruised but not broken—wounded but not in despair—purified, spiritualised, and amended, by that approach to the higher and better world—that realisation of the actual existence and deep interest of that grave where the heart lies buried.

“And so time and nature did the beneficent work allotted to them, and this young elastic spirit rose again, and shook off the load of intolerable sorrow—and the fair world of God smiled upon her from without; and the true, loving heart yearning to what remained beat within—and thus was she drawn insensibly from self, and from selfish sorrow, and the bitter anguish of cruel regret—perhaps the most difficult of any sorrow to bear—was soothed. Emma left her room and returned to her family, clad in her deep mourning, a lovely virgin widow, but looking most like some bright angel of gentleness and goodness, as she resumed her place in the school-room and nursery.

And there imagine her labouring in the best manner that she knew how—sometimes, it must be confessed, sadly wearied and almost out of patience; sometimes feeling careless and indifferent—striving, as it seemed in vain, to force up her energies to the task, but upon the whole persevering and bravely combating the difficulties which surrounded her. But in spite of all she could do, she was becoming every day more and more aware of the disheartening truth—that she was not equal to the self-imposed task—that she had neither strength of body nor experience in life sufficient to overcome the obstacles which met her upon every side.

She again had recourse to her mother.

It must be observed, that the mother and daughter saw very little of each other at this period of their lives, though they lived under the same roof and were the best friends in the world.

Emma loved her mother, who, filled with worldly, ill-directed notions and anxieties as she was—still was a true mother—lived in and for her children, and studied their interests and their happiness most disinterestedly, that is to

say, according to her imperfect ideas of those things, in which their best interests and true happiness consisted.

She was, moreover, an attached and affectionate wife—could see no fault in her husband, seeming to take it for granted that his errors were a matter of course, common to all men of his rank—great evils certainly, but unavoidable—and to be warded off and provided against as well as one could; but as inevitable and vainly to be resisted as the course and variations of the seasons themselves.

This way of viewing matters saved her, it is certain, from much pain. Many a person helped forward by this homely obtuseness of mind through circumstances which would drive finer spirits to despair—but on the other hand, moral insensibility like this is the cause of a thousand ill consequences.

What the Marchioness so easily reconciled herself to look upon as a necessary attendant upon her husband's position in life, she took little pains to remedy or to overcome. She never troubled herself to attempt the use of her influence to arrest at the fountain head

this flood of mischiefs, which threatened to overwhelm them all.

Gently to persuade her husband to better things, to do so with a tender prudence, which in effect is almost irresistible—to awaken the still small voice which whispers in every human breast—arousing and purifying—the poor Marchioness as little thought of such things as of moving the poles of the earth.

But we must return to Emma, who is upon her way to her mother's dressing-room, in order to relate her difficulties, and to seek counsel and assistance in her troubles.

Her mother, this time, had not the terrible steward's book open before her, but she was employed in reading a letter, and one which seemed to afford her considerable pleasure, for the usual careworn expression of her face was changed into one of satisfaction and complacency.

"Mama, are you busy?—or may I come and have a little talk with you?"

"Oh, is it you, my darling!—Yes—yes, come in—come in—sit down, my dear. Why Emma, what's the matter with you? You look like one bowed down with many troubles

—What are they, love?—Nay ”—kissing her
—“You know I cannot allow this—”

“Indeed, mama, I *am* bowed down with many troubles, and to the very earth, I sometimes think ; or rather, I am quite wearied, disheartened, and in despair. Dear mother, I am too young to succeed in the management of those children—especially of the boys.”

“And is not that just what I told you, my love, when you took the wild idea into your good, little, romantic head.”

“Ah, mama! you were right. But what is to be done? ”

“What is to be done? Why let them alone—they will get along yet awhile well enough with nurse and Mr Macdonough.”

“Oh! dear, dear mama—don’t say that. If you only knew . . . ”

“My child, what *is* the use of vexing oneself about what cannot possibly be helped, —Sure, and have I not enough upon my mind, as I told you before. Emma, dear, it’s no use concealing the matter from you—which I would have been glad to have done

to spare you pain,—Your father is almost penniless.”

Emma only looked into her mother’s face with a terrified, troubled expression. She could make no answer at first—at last she said, in a low voice—

“I was afraid I had heard that he had lost a good deal of money; but I had no idea of things being so bad as this. What is to be done—what *can* we do?”

“Do?—my love! there is but one thing to be done :—We must live on in this place; there are potatoes to be had here, and bread and beef, such as it is—but there is scarcely a shilling to be got in the shape of money—and so, child, that being our position, what is the use of worrying ourselves about the young ones; they *must* take their chance—there is no help for it;—and you, good little thing, you might fag yourself to death trying to stem the evil . . . as well try to stop a river with a straw. No, my darling—wear yourself out you may, and lose all your beauty and spirits in this vain attempt—for vain it is—I always knew;—but that must not be,

Emma—you, at least, shall not be sacrificed; better things are in store, I trust, for you—you shall be safely housed, my sweet one, at all events."

"My dear mother, what can you mean by this?"—

"Why, my own"—laying her hand upon the letter which was spread open upon the table before her—"this it is—There is one who offers you wealth and security, and a most fair position in society, though certainly not what you would have been entitled to expect, if things had gone as they ought to have done."

"Mother, you know that is . . ."

"My love, a sealed subject between us—I would not tease my Emma—she knows I did not disturb her in the first natural indulgence of her sorrow; but there is a time for all things,—as the wise man somewhere or other says—a time to mourn, and a time to rejoice, a time to weep, and a time to have done with weeping."

"No mama; no time to rejoice, though there may be a time to have done with weeping, and I trust I have come to it; I am at

rest and peace again, as he is who lies sleeping under the waves ; but rejoice ! no, mother ; such feelings are over for me."

"My dear Emma, what age are you?"

"I shall be twenty next birthday, mama."

"And you really propose to spend the remainder of your life, probably between fifty and sixty years, in doing what ?

"What I can"

"What you can?—right enough—but do you mean to have no interests, no happiness—to abandon all thoughts of the felicity proper to your sex and age? Do you intend to be a nun?—Have you taken, as many a poor misguided nun, alas! in a moment of despondency has done—or, do you intend to take, a vow to be as miserable, desolate, and unblest as you possibly can, because one man has deceived your expectations of him,—and because the same young man, among the number cut off every year, has prematurely died? My dear Emma! I hoped to have found you less romantic and unreasonable."

"Dearest mother, pray don't use such hard words, I don't deserve them, indeed I do not."

“Nay, my love; I beg your pardon, I am delighted to hear you say so. Then you have made no rash, absurd resolutions against settling yourself—Good girl—I do beg your pardon.”

Settling herself!—what a mode of expression—what an idea to present to sweet, generous nineteen.

“I have made no resolutions, dearest mother—I never thought of making any—but just at present, it is impossible,” and the tears sprang to her eyes—“He might, perhaps, be unworthy, and have a great many faults—poor Edward! I don’t know—but he loved me, and I loved him as, let me live a thousand years, I shall never love another again.”

“I don’t suppose you will, and I do not know what that has to do with the question. If he had lived, poor child, you might have found but too good reason, by all accounts, to withdraw the esteem and affection you speak of from him; but he is dead, and death sanctifies everything.”

“Yes, mama, it does.”

“But that is no reason why you should throw your life away, my dear Emma; believe me, an honest and sincere affection, though it does not mount to these altitudes—and an escape from the utmost distress and ruin—poverty and disgrace, perhaps, united—is well worth having; you must accept this cruel lot, my child,” she said, smiling kindly, “for the sake of your poor brothers and sisters—for all our sakes.”

“What lot, mother?—What are you speaking of?”

“The proposal that is made in this letter—you look surprised—it is from one you are pretty well acquainted with, I believe,—it is from William Aubrey.”

“William Aubrey!”

“And why do you look so astonished, my dear? it is the most natural thing in the world. He evidently admired you very much when you were in London; and besides, he is in possession of all his father’s immense fortune.”

“I forgot that,” said Emma.

The Marchioness could not help smiling at

the ingenuous simplicity, as she thought it, of Emma's remark—but she took no notice, and went on—

“I thought you seemed rather to like him last spring.”

“Yes, I did—I liked him very much . . . as a brother—”

“Of course, my dear, you could not *then* think of him in any other light—but now, all this is altered.”

“It is, indeed—but it seems to me to be a very cruel and indelicate proceeding on his part—I should not have expected it from *him*.”

“No, my love, there you are quite right, and he is, I doubt not, utterly incapable of anything of the sort—at all events, there is nothing of either of these bad things to be found here. This letter simply contains a request that he may be allowed to visit Hurstmonceaux—but he acknowledges that he thinks himself bound in honour to confess to me, that the true object of his visit is . . . to endeavour, in short, to make himself acceptable to you.”

“Acceptable! He will never—never—do it—in that sense, at least.”

“My own Emma—all I shall ask of you at present, is all that he asks for himself—merely to be allowed to try his chance.”

“No, it is useless—don’t let him come, mama.—It would be very wrong to himself to allow it.—I never—never can—I never, never, will.”

“My dear, I wrote yesterday, and invited him.”

“Oh, mama! I did not think you could—I did not think you would—be so barbarous—so cruel to us both.”

“My love, what strange expressions you do indulge in.”

“I beg your pardon, darling mother.—”

“Indeed you ought—however, I will grant your pardon, dear—but upon terms, mind—in short, upon condition that you promise me to give William Aubrey a fair chance—a friendly reception and a patient hearing—and don’t look so disgusted, I beg of you, my sweet one. Dear child, we are not going to play the part of a tyrant father and mother in an old novel—such things are never done now! We are not going to force a disgusting marriage with a horrible monster upon you—we are both of us a good deal too good-natured,

I am afraid, for all that," she added, with a little laugh.—

"All we wish you to do—and this is what every rational creature under the sun would require of a child under such circumstances—is, to permit the visit of a man of wealth and merit, fortune and character united—and not throw such an opportunity away, as a sort of offering upon an old tomb. You shall do just as you like afterwards. Heaven forbid ! that for the sake of your father, or myself, or even of these poor children,—I should say a syllable to influence you in a matter which concerns your own happiness first of all and far more than it ought to do any of ours."

Emma was silent—

And then over her young girl's heart there came the recollection of that face so full of sensibility, those eyes so replete with dreamy passion, that voice which had exercised such a strange power over her.

Her mother by a kind of natural instinct seemed to divine her thoughts. She considered it prudent not to arouse further opposition by pressing her point, and resolved to leave

things to work of themselves, and only saying, "Would you like to read the letter?—pray, do so, if you please."—She rose, as if to leave the room—

But Emma caught her by the dress—

"Mama ! mama ! hear me !—Do not let William Aubrey come.—It would be so wrong—so shocking."

"I don't see that, my dear, at all—besides, it is too late.—My letter is gone."

CHAPTER XV.

Of Love that never found his earthly close,
What sequel? Streaming eyes and breaking hearts?
Or all the same as if he had not been?

TENNYSON.

WILLIAM AUBREY was excessively altered.

His figure had always been spare, it was now wasted till it looked scarcely earthly; his face had been pale, his large lustrous eye deep and serious; but now the complexion was ashy, the lips white, the dark, intellectual eye filled with the profoundest melancholy.

It was evening when he arrived, and a day earlier than he had been expected. The Marquis was still sitting over his wine; the Marchioness had retreated to her boudoir for a little rest after one of her busy, over-tasked mornings—Lady Emma and her three little sisters had the drawing-room to themselves.

It was a fine evening towards the end of October. There was a wood fire burning in the wide open grate, and candles were lighted in various parts of the room, but sparingly, and so as only to cast a sort of dim shadowy twilight through the vast apartment; but upon one side the casements of a large oriel window were thrown open, and admitted the fresh, slightly frosted air, and the rays of a bright autumn moon which fell full upon them.

Steps descended from this oriel window to the flower-garden, and upon these steps there was a group of figures.

The eldest sister, wrapped in the folds of a very large, but most soft and fine white Shetland shawl, was sitting with a little and very lovely child upon her lap. She had folded it up in the shawl she wore, to protect it from the cold—and there it half lay, half sat, the pretty arms and hands stretched out, playing with the black velvet ribbon worn round the young lady's neck, and from which a small medallion was hanging.

On the step behind her another little girl was sitting, busily employed in arranging the

plaits and tresses of her sister's hair—whilst another still older sat by her side, holding one hand in hers.

The moon fell full and bright upon the little party.

The elder sister's eyes were lifted towards it. They glistened, or seemed to be glistening, with tears—the expression of that beautiful face was most tender and melancholy.

The hall door was standing open, when William Aubrey arrived, and in this house of disorder no one was exactly ready to introduce him—so, imagining that the room, to which one of the servants now busy removing his luggage had pointed, was empty, and finding that door also open, he entered, and without attracting the attention of the little assemblage.

But he saw them himself, and his heart told him at once in whose presence he stood—it beat almost audibly—he had in truth, of late, become very nervous and weak—and he felt himself almost fearfully overcome by the least emotion—he was little more than the shadow of his former self.

Upon perceiving the group he had stopped

short, and he remained with his eyes fixed upon the scene. It was a composition worthy of a great master, and should have been named not Charity—according to the usual manner when there is a young woman grouped with little children—but Family Love.

He thought, and he thought justly, that he had never in ideal picturing, or in actual life, seen anything half so pretty.

That face and form which had so captivated him exercising a power so lamentably great—that charm which had proved invincible to a heart till then inaccessible to such fascinations, seemed, under this new aspect, to be only the more irresistible.

The attitude in which she sat, her loving arms clasped round the pretty clinging child, her graceful, swan-like neck bent down to the little prattler—that wealth of fine hair so artlessly displayed,—the little one so busily intent upon what she was about—above all, the look of fixed attention and deep, earnest love, with which the eldest of the children was looking at her!—all told, and in the most unaffected manner, that tale of womanly, sisterly affection and

love, which is perhaps, the thing upon earth most attractive to a man with the feelings of William Aubrey. He would not have moved for worlds. He stood watching her—indulging his wild passion—drinking in, as it were, fresh draughts of love, with the utmost recklessness of consequences—recklessness is not too strong a word to use. He was all at sea as to his future fate—whether he should succeed or not in his aspirations; and he knew and felt that he was risking his life upon the cast. A love such as his, once indulged as he was at that moment indulging it, is a man's existence—a rare thing it is among men for existence to depend upon love; but he knew that so it would henceforward be with him—that literally he could not, and he should not, live without her.

Her eyes were now bent downward upon the little playful child, with a most loving expression—then she turned them tenderly to her sister—and then they were again raised, glistening, to the bright, beautiful moon.

“Is it not lovely, Emma, dear?” whispered Felicia, pressing up gently to her—“What is

the reason these beautiful bright moons come in harvest? Does God send them to help men in the harvest?"—

"I do not know what is the reason that harvest moons are so very bright, dear, for nobody ever explained these things to me. I don't even know why it is now full moon, and sometimes half moon, and sometimes no moon at all. All I can tell you, my Felicia, is the same as what we read to-day—God made the great lights and placed them up above there, to rule the day and the night, and to be for signs and seasons, and for days and for years ; and I dare say that he sends this bright harvest moon, to light poor fellows home safely who have been out reaping late in the evening, for he is very good, and I think he does not forget any of us."

And again she lifted up her eyes and gazed at the fair planet, shining before her in effulgent glory—tinting the tops of the waving woods—silvering the tiny waves of the slumbering lake—and casting large, broad shadows upon the lawn which stretched before them.

How beautiful and peaceful it all was !

And then a gentle breeze arose and bowed the grouped outline of those noble woods, and rippled fresh and sweet across the water, and the sound of a distant chapel bell—where vespers were going on, was heard, so solemn, and so harmonious, blending with this beautiful scene.

He could have stood so for ever.

Insensibly he drew nearer and nearer, until he was almost close to the window. The peace of heaven seemed to pervade his passionate heart—all the terrible past at that moment forgotten, he was living only in the present.

He had advanced so near that he could hear every whispered word, every little endearing tone, that passed among these children of nature.

At last, Lady Emma made a little turn—Milly looked up—caught a view of William Aubrey—and exclaiming “Oh!”—dropped her sister’s hair and stared at him.

“What is it, Milly?”

“It’s a gentleman,” whispered Milly—“all in black, close by.”

The little company were up in a moment.

Emma, hastily putting Lucinda down upon

the steps, colouring and confused, began to draw up and hastily arrange her hair,—whilst the three little girls stood perfectly still,—fixing their large, wondering eyes upon the intruder.

“I beg your pardon—I sincerely beg your pardon, Lady Emma, for disturbing you,” William Aubrey began—stammering considerably, yet feeling blest beyond measure thus to find himself in her presence again,—and—ah!—without a rival near,—that his pale face coloured, and his eyes were beaming.

“I sincerely beg your pardon—I ought not—I ought not, I know—but your servant showed me in here—and there was no one in the room—and the night is so lovely—and your sisters—these are your sisters?”

“They are my sisters, Mr Aubrey,—Felicia,—Millicent,—dear little Lucinda,—shake hands with Mr Aubrey.” Her own hands trembled and her lips quivered as she put forward one little hand of each, to be taken in Mr Aubrey’s,—and kept standing a little aloof herself and struggling to prevent herself from bursting out in tears.

It was all that she could do to help it.

Such a crowd of recollections rushed over her as she pronounced that name.

He touched the little hands she presented,—and then he took her own—that fair, delicate hand, and pressed it;—oh! so reverently, to his lips.

There was something in the feeling he put even into that little action that made her heart tremble strangely.

She lifted up her eyes, they were still glittering, and they met his; those dark, melting, serious eyes,—and she saw his wan, and wasted face; and she said gently—

“Have you been ill? You are very much changed!”

“I have been ill,—but I am not changed,” was his answer. “There has been much to soften — but nothing to change — I never change.”

“I mean,” she said, “that you look so thin.”

“Yes,” answered he, smilingly—with that peculiar smile of his that possessed so strange a power over every one,—that peculiar smile which upon a man’s face is so irresistible. “I believe I am grown very thin—very old—

and more than ordinarily ill-looking—is it not so?”

“Ill-looking!—Oh, no! I did not mean that.”—

“But are you not coming in?” he said, drawing back, for he stood there in the window obstructing it altogether, while she was standing before him, a sister in each hand.

“Yes, it is getting rather cold—shall we go in, dears?”

They said nothing, but still kept their eyes fixed upon the strange gentleman.

He offered his arm, which she took to assist her to descend from the window-seat, and then he lifted the children in one by one.

“I will go and tell my mother that you are come,” said Emma, feeling more confused and troubled than she thought quite right, and with a strange mixture of the painful and agreeable in her sensations—she thought she should have revolted against William Aubrey when actually in his presence, and after what she had heard of the new character in which he was about to appear—but it was not so.—On the contrary, her heart seemed

most perversely to grow towards him.—How unaccountable—how unnatural, it all was.

She left the room accompanied by her three little sisters, his eyes followed her to the door—it closed upon her, and he returned to the window, to stand there, and in his turn to fix his eyes upon that glorious moon.—

He might fix his eyes upon the glorious moon, but in truth he saw her not—a vision far brighter was before him—he could look, could think of nothing else.

There she was, more lovely than even his imagination had ever conceived her—her expression had assumed a softness, and at the same time there was a sense and strength that seemed new; the lines which remain after a great sorrow has been endured in fortitude and patience. Then the situation in which he had surprised her, so simple and touching—those little sisters who clung to her, with such love and reverence, as if to some angel—and more, far more than all—a something which he had not dared to hope for—a something in her manner which told him that it would not be personal repugnance, at least, with which he should have to contend!

There was every reason, that in so short a moment could be afforded, to bid him not despair—then, why this heavy, heavy load upon his heart. Why, at the moment which ought to have rendered him the happiest man in existence, this spectre of the past—this cold, cold, ice-bound chill within his bosom?

Why would imagination still force him back—to stand upon that wild cliff, to listen to the breaking waves of that rushing spring-tide sea, as they thundered and splashed below, casting up volumes of foam? . . . Why were his thoughts there, and not here—and why that ghastly face, rising, as it were, upon the top of the wave, and those cold blue eyes, fixed immoveably upon his?

He tried to drive it off—he shook himself, as if to dissipate the vision—he looked round the large apartment—he tried to force himself to admire the glorious picture outside—to fix his attention upon those woods shadowing down towards the lake—upon that silvery lake—those softly rustling leaves—that glorious moon—that scene where she had stood before him, like some bright angel!

There was nothing left for him to do—what

was done could not be undone—the past is irrevocable. There was neither restitution not atonement possible now. Why, then, indulge this vain regret? *He* had not done it—*he* had not done it. Nay—say that even granting he had borne a part in it—that he had been the efficient, though remote, cause of this dismal catastrophe. Grant that he had—and who should dare to say that it was so?—grant that it were so, what help for it now?

Oh! that estate!—that rich inheritance!—would that there were not a sixpence, or an acre! It clung to him like the accursed robe of Dejanira—or rather like that leaden mantle with which I think it is Dante that clothes the covetous sinner's soul—pressing him down, weighing on him, stupifying him under the eternal load. But then, rob him of that inheritance, and where would he be? He would be deprived of that for which alone life was of any value—with that he would lose her—all chance of possessing her!—idolized with such intensity of purity and truth as was in itself enough to save a soul.

He was recalled, by the opening of the door, to the present, passing every-day world—a world

in which estates and riches, however obtained, prove mostly anything but loads of lead—a world in which fortunate heirs soon learn to forget the deaths and the sufferings through which a way has been cleared for them—the lucky ones!—to turn from the silent graves of those that have passed away to make them room, and gladly enjoy the succession. The door opened, and the course of thought was at once changed, as the haunting visions and excited thoughts of the night vanish before the entrance of the housemaid, to put water in the bath and light the fire.

Lady Hurstmonceaux came in, and behind her a footman appeared, bringing in more lights. She received William Aubrey in the most cordial manner, and began all sorts of hospitable inquiries as to dinner.

It would have been ungracious, amidst all this civility, to have recollected—and he did not just then recollect—that it used to be rather different; but that now he was no longer a younger son, a struggling barrister, and a most deleterious personage. So he received these attentions with the happy ease and dignity of a man who knows he is, by

the breadth of his acres, well entitled to them.

True, he was not intrinsically, as regarded those eternal moral relations which shall not fade away. In that view, he was not worth—no, not the thousandth part of what he had been when he had been so formally and coolly thanked in London for saving a child's life. But at this moment, even he was too much occupied with the present to make reflections, and too much pleased at the footing upon which he found himself placed, to examine the matter too curiously.

“How had he travelled, what sort of passage—was this his first visit to Ireland? &c., &c.”

Nothing could be more pointedly courteous.

He refused dinner and accepted tea, hoping that the family would assemble then, and longing to see her again.

The Marchioness rang and ordered tea an hour earlier than usual, and fresh wood to the fire, for the evening was becoming chilly, and there was a slight frost; then she took her work, and as the fire blazed and crackled cheerfully, she made herself as agreeable as possible to her guest, who was rather absent, absorbed in his own thoughts.

But the Marchioness talked on, and discussed all sorts of matters in a clever lively way, for she was in excellent spirits. It was a pity there was nobody to listen.

William Aubrey, in fact, heard scarcely a syllable that she said, and started from his reverie as one awakens from a dream, on the entrance of the footman, bearing in table cloth and tea-tray, cups, saucers, bread, and so on, and all was set out for a comfortable conversational country tea—one of the few comfortable things to be got at that house.

He pushed back his chair, without being aware what he was doing, and placed himself so as to command a view of these several operations, and of the door.

The Marchioness watched these little movements, and her heart leapt for joy, lightened for the moment of its load of care, and she breathed freely and felt happy. Poor, worried mother, how seldom did she know what it was to feel happy.

But, to her surprise, she found herself more than pleased with the appearance of this young man, whom she had so carelessly passed over before.

She thought, and perhaps she was right,

—that his looks and manners were much improved. He had a very distinguished air, certainly, and was positively good-looking—though pale and ill, to be sure, the more she examined his appearance the better she was pleased, and she ended by deciding that he was still more interesting than handsome; just what such a girl as Emma would like best.

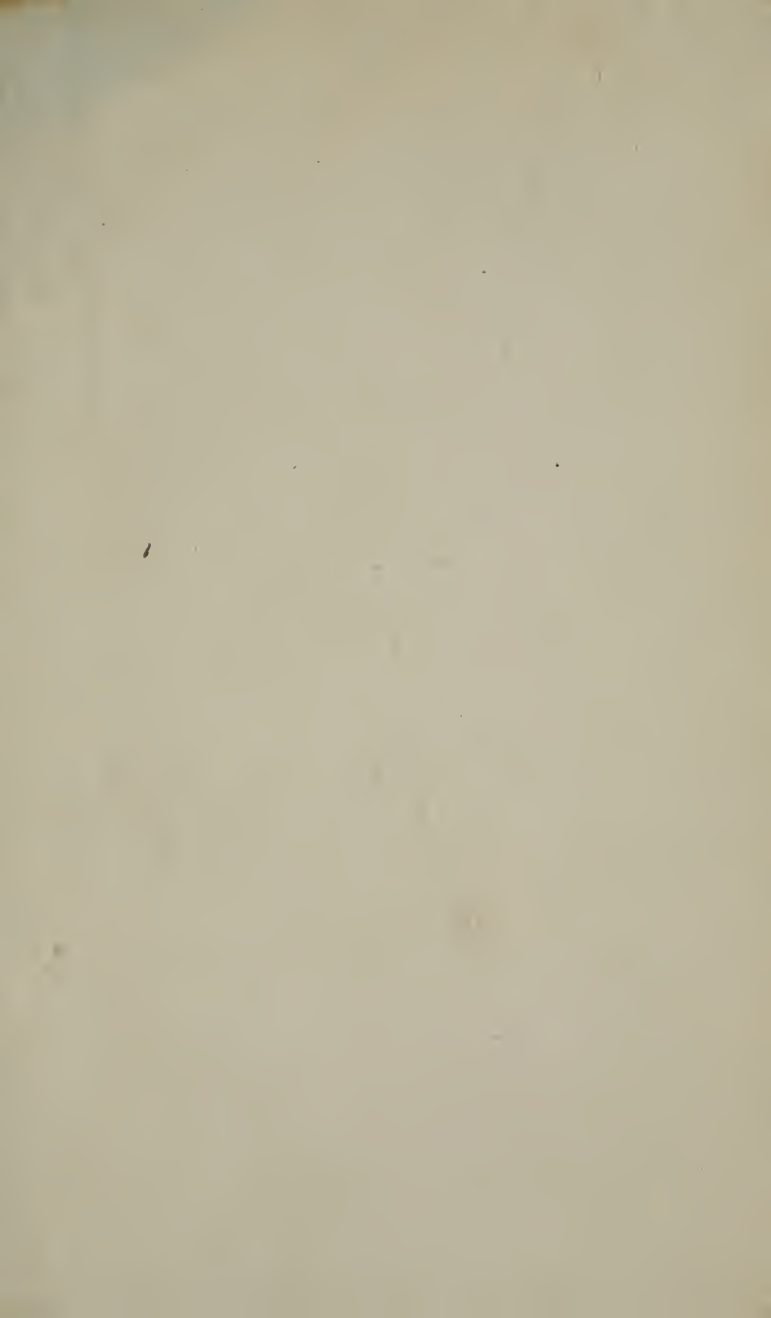
She smiled to herself as she observed that his eyes were fixed upon the door, and soon it opened, and Lady Emma appeared, looking as her mother just wished her to look. So interesting—and so charming!—and she took her usual place at the tea table, and the urn simmered, and the fire crackled, and the pleasant jingle of cups and saucers was heard. It was as comfortable and cosy as if they had been in the cottage of Dickens's carrier, with the fire blazing and teakettle singing, and this though there was the lofty roof over head and the walls covered with splendid pictures around them. It was a perfect union of all that the two extremes of human life can give of agreeable.

He had started from his chair as she entered the room, and then had as hastily

re-seated himself, but his eyes followed her. But at last, when she was fairly settled at her tea-table, it seemed as if he could resist the attraction no longer, and in a few moments he rose and approached it, and was by her side, and began to talk to her. A trifling conversation it was that passed; but the mother with delight marked the expression of his eyes, and the pretty shy looks of the Lady Emma as she lifted up her face and answered him.

He did not at all resemble his brother, and so far it was fortunate. There were no sad recollections awakened by his external appearance at least. Presently he has slid down into a chair by the table, and soon they are talking easily, and comfortably—she making and arranging her tea, and he sitting, cup in hand, forgetting to sip—forgetting to carry cups—forgetting everything!

END OF VOL. II.



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